



# SHOVEL KNIGHT

OFFICIAL DESIGN WORKS





# FOREWORD



Back in early 2013, I was Senior Editor of IGN - the world's biggest and most-read video game website - when I received a mysterious email from a small collective of developers who were preparing to launch a Kickstarter for a game that, to put it lightly, was right up my alley. They wanted me to write about their project, a fledgling, pixelated, retro-fueled side-scroller called *Shovel Knight*.



I've been writing and podcasting about video games professionally for well over a decade and have been playing them on a near-daily basis for almost 30 years, but even as time passed, I've always remained enamored with the likes of Mega Man, Castlevania, Zelda, Ninja Gaiden, and Mario. *Mega Man 3* is still my favorite game of all time. The NES remains my favorite console. The side-scroller-slash-action genre remains my go-to. For me, it simply doesn't get much better than the games of yore. *Shovel Knight*, the devs claimed, was an ode to those classics. The endeavor was clearly ambitious, but my interest was undeniably and inescapably piqued, even at a time when gaming Kickstarters were a dime a dozen. This one, it was obvious, was different.



It took me all of five seconds to realize that my friends-to-be at Yacht Club Games and I were on the same page, and a smile quickly plastered itself on my face as our correspondence flew back and forth at a feverish rate. I received a lot of pitches when I was a journalist, and I crossed paths with a lot of mediocre, bad, and terrible games. A lot of email came through my inbox that wasted an incredible amount of my time, with flowery language and promises of amazingness obscuring an otherwise dire reality. It was important to me that my readers were exposed to something meaningful and worthwhile, something they'd like and appreciate. Otherwise, what's the point?



Writing about and covering *Shovel Knight*, as it turns out, was one of the very best uses of my time imaginable, because in every single respect, Yacht Club was poised to deliver on its promises. (And as we would later find out when the game launched, they completely nailed what they set out to do.) Their ambition was admirable. Their mission was critical. This team clearly knew what it was doing.



The development crew shot me some preliminary art and information about their still-secret project, one incubating in the shadows for some time. My jaw just about hit the ground as we went back and forth discussing the game, scouring over art, imagining what the final product would look like. I was actually shocked that they were going to utilize Kickstarter at all. Surely a publisher would be interested in something like this, especially considering the deep pool of experience the small team was working with. But Yacht Club chose not to take that route, selling their IP to the highest bidder simply to see their vision come to life. They wanted to control the development experience and deliver *their* game, exactly how *they* envisioned it.



I was authentically excited about *Shovel Knight* after our first round of emails concluded. It was obvious to me that it had all the hallmarks of a game for *people like me*. And I knew, deep down, that there were plenty of *people like me*, folks desperate for games that reminded them of their youth, of a simpler time when gameplay was king, when we fawned over pretty sprites and beautiful, pixelated backgrounds, when we were left floored by MIDI tracks and grueling difficulty. No tricks. No gimmicks. Just a game, not unlike some of the amazing titles we remember from 20 or 30 years ago.



All I knew, at the very bottom of my heart, was that this game was going to be massive, and I agreed to write about it to showcase for my audience what Yacht Club Games had cooking. To this day, I'm proud that I revealed *Shovel Knight* to the world and helped introduce the talented team at Yacht Club to legions of players who understood exactly what they were trying to do. Their pitch wasn't lip service, and *Shovel Knight* wasn't smoke and mirrors. They were the real deal, and so was their game.





A few years later, it seems my gut instinct was correct. At 1.2 million copies sold and counting, *Shovel Knight* delivered on each and every one of its promises. It's one of the very best games of the last ten years of any kind, and very easily one of the greatest throwbacks in an industry that tosses around words like "retro," "old-school," and "vintage" like they're going out of style. As we all know, we're more often disappointed than we are thrilled at the end result when verbiage like that flies around. But not this time.

This isn't hyperbole. These aren't the words of someone who's friends with the developers and nothing more. *Shovel Knight* is, in short, a masterpiece. It's absolutely earned its legions of adoring fans, all the while maintaining mindshare in an industry that's always moving on to the next big thing. And it's created well-earned attention and respect for the small team of men and women who made it possible.

There's a major reason for *Shovel Knight*'s success other than its silky-smooth, exceptionally fluid gameplay, stellar soundtrack, and quirky story. It's the gorgeous art and the interesting, well-designed cast of characters that have proven to be a major draw for many fans. In this way, *Shovel Knight* really *does* pay homage to the games of yore, because while I love me some Tinker Knight and King Knight, I loved me some Magnet Man and Quick Man back in the day, too. Shovel Knight himself is a Blue Bomber for a new generation, with a move set, a world, and a mission that draws directly from our favorite exemplars. These characters bring us all back to the days of flipping through NES and SNES manuals and scouring through Nintendo Power, eating up the art that would be translated onto the screen in a cruder fashion.

This book is dedicated not only to Yacht Club and their wonderful game, but also to the gorgeous art that caught your eyeballs and drew your interest to begin with. From preliminary sketches to final designs, you're about to wade through more than 100 pages of artistic goodness crafted just for you, the *Shovel Knight* aficionado. See how each character was conceptualized, sketched, and designed, and get some background on this wonderful game. Soak it all in.

I'd be remiss if I didn't take this moment to thank Yacht Club Games for *Shovel Knight*. To all of my friends over there, including (but not at all limited to) Sean Velasco, David D'Angelo, and Nick Wozniak: I tip my hat to you. You truly outdid yourselves, and you deserve all of the accolades, credit, and success you've earned (and then some). Bravo. And, of course, thank you for bringing me along on your journey, even in a cursory way. It's been a true honor to write about, cover, talk about - and above all else play - *Shovel Knight*.

I knew from second one how big *Shovel Knight* was going to be, and I have nothing but pride flowing through my nerdy veins for what this team has accomplished. I was staggered to witness several times in person - whether at PSX or PAX - just how many people love this finely crafted universe. Gamers absolutely adore it, and the hordes of folks buying merch, demoing the game, and chatting about it at these trade shows are a testament to that. After all, you don't just stumble upon a million-plus seller in today's crowded gaming scene.

I, like all of you, can't wait to see what Yacht Club Games has brewing next. But for now, let's enjoy an artistic voyage through the glory that is *Shovel Knight*.

For Shovelry!

**COLIN MORIARTY**  
Co-Founder, Kinda Funny  
September 20, 2016





# SHOVEL KNIGHT

## OFFICIAL DESIGN WORKS

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## CHAPTER 1 GALLERY

Not only will you find some of *Shovel Knight*'s most iconic and recognizable key art and promotional art here, we have also prepared an all-new lineup of gorgeous tribute illustrations just for this chapter as well! Exclusive to this book, see for yourself how a number of talented artists from around the world have utilized their own unique styles and strengths to express their love for all things *Shovel Knight*.











 PROMOTIONAL ART





TRIBUTE ART by JEFFREY "CHAMBA" CRUZ

ILLUSTRATOR: Street Fighter comics,  
RandomVeus comics, Mega Man Legacy Collection







**TRIBUTE ART by DAX GORDINE**

**ILLUSTRATOR: Plants vs. Zombies 2,  
Bravoman comics, Forest Folk webcomic**





TRIBUTE ART by ANDREW DICKMAN  
(with COLORS by JOSH PEREZ)

STORYBOARD ARTIST, ILLUSTRATOR







**TRIBUTE ART by JOE VRIENS**

**ILLUSTRATOR: Marvel: War of Heroes,  
Darkstalkers comics**





TRIBUTE ART by ASHLEY DAVIS

ILLUSTRATOR: Legend of the Valkyrie webcomic,  
Jailbird webcomic







**TRIBUTE ART by ROB PORTER ("ROBAATO")**

**DEVELOPER / ILLUSTRATOR: Cryamore**





TRIBUTE ART by ERIC VEDDER

ART DIRECTOR: Digital Extremes  
ILLUSTRATOR: Darkstalkers comics

GALLERY







**TRIBUTE ART**  
**by GONZALO ORDÓÑEZ ARIAS "GENZOMAN"**

**CHARACTER DESIGNER / ILLUSTRATOR: Double Dragon Neon**  
**COVER ARTIST: Street Fighter comics**





**ART BOOK COVER by EDWIN HUANG**

**ILLUSTRATOR: Street Fighter comics,  
Mega Man comics, Skullkickers comics**







## CHAPTER 2

# CHARACTERS AND WORLD

Here's where the real meat of the book begins! In this chapter, you'll find an absolute plethora of key art, production illustrations, and development sketches for the myriad characters, items, and more that make up the colorful world of *Shovel Knight*. We've also included full character profiles for the game's main and supporting cast, so you just might end up learning something new about your favorite *Shovel Knight* characters!





# SHOVEL KNIGHT



◆ KEY ART 1

A practitioner of the ancient code of Shovelry, Shovel Knight can do almost anything with his signature weapon, the Shovel Blade. His ingenuity and quick thinking have won him many battles, even though his stature is small! Always honest and helpful, Shovel Knight lives by the creed of Shovelry: Slash Mercilessly and Dig Tirelessly!

- Pros: Kindhearted, clever, master of the Shovel Blade
- Cons: Bound by the Code of Shovelry

## ■ GAME SPRITES



◆ KEY ART 2



◆ KEY ART 3







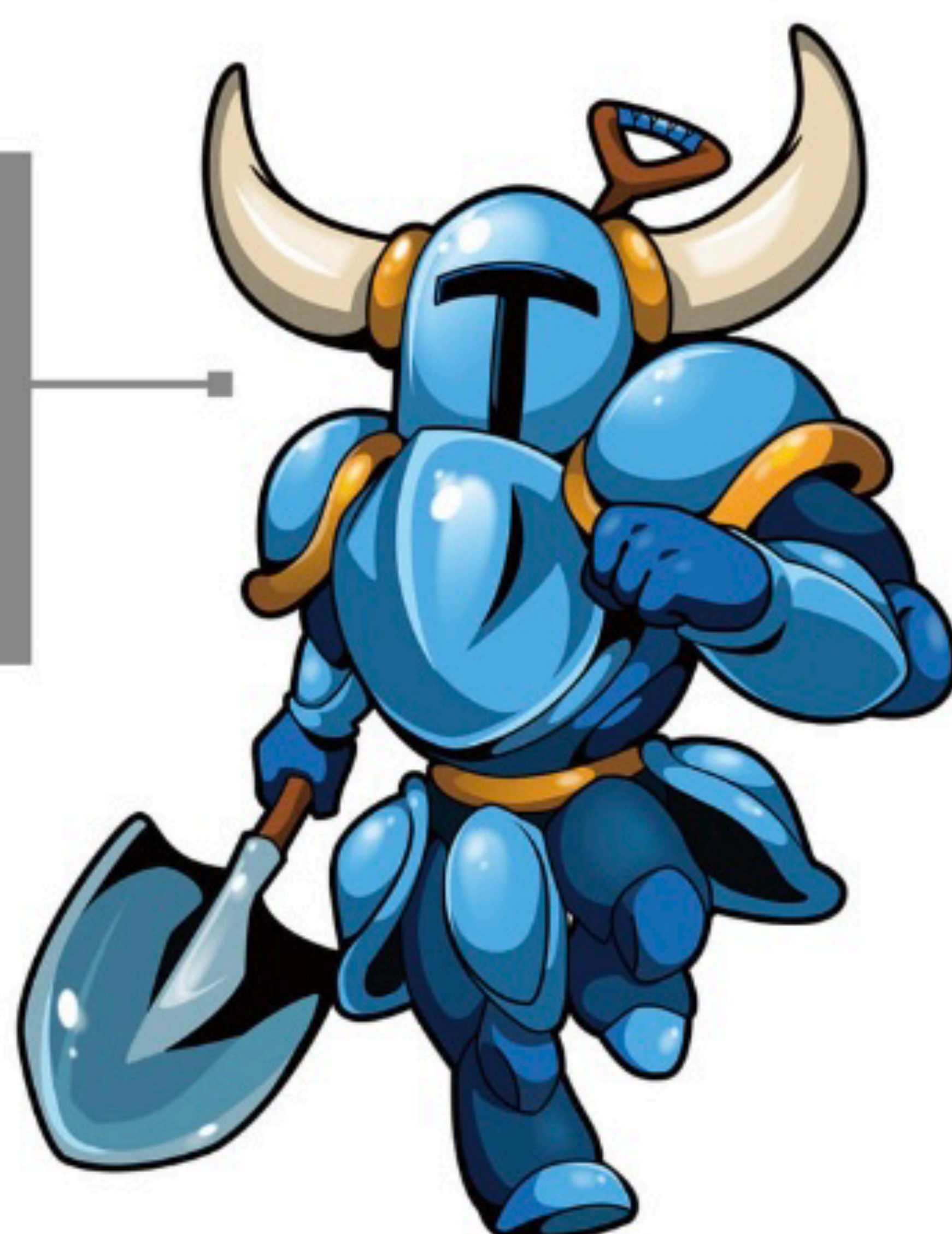
◆ KEY ART 4



◆ KEY ART 5

#### DEV. COMMENTARY

This was one of the first official key arts of Shovel Knight ever made! From the start, we had the idea that Shovel Knight was a knight with giant horns and a Boba Fett-style helmet. With a clear vision, it didn't take many revisions to get to Shovel Knight's final look.



◆ KEY ART 6



◆ KEY ART 7



◆ KEY ART 8



◆ KEY ART 9

#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Shovel Knight's design came through gameplay. We were thinking about a player that could defeat an enemy in two moves: 1) flip them in the air and 2) down thrust to finish them! We realized this was a digging motion, which led to a shovel!



## ◆ ADDITIONAL KEY ART

### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Using a simplified, cuter version of Shovel Knight, we were able to more closely represent the sprite and describe the actions he could take for the game manual.



FIRE LIGHT 1



CAUTIOUS



FIRE LIGHT 2



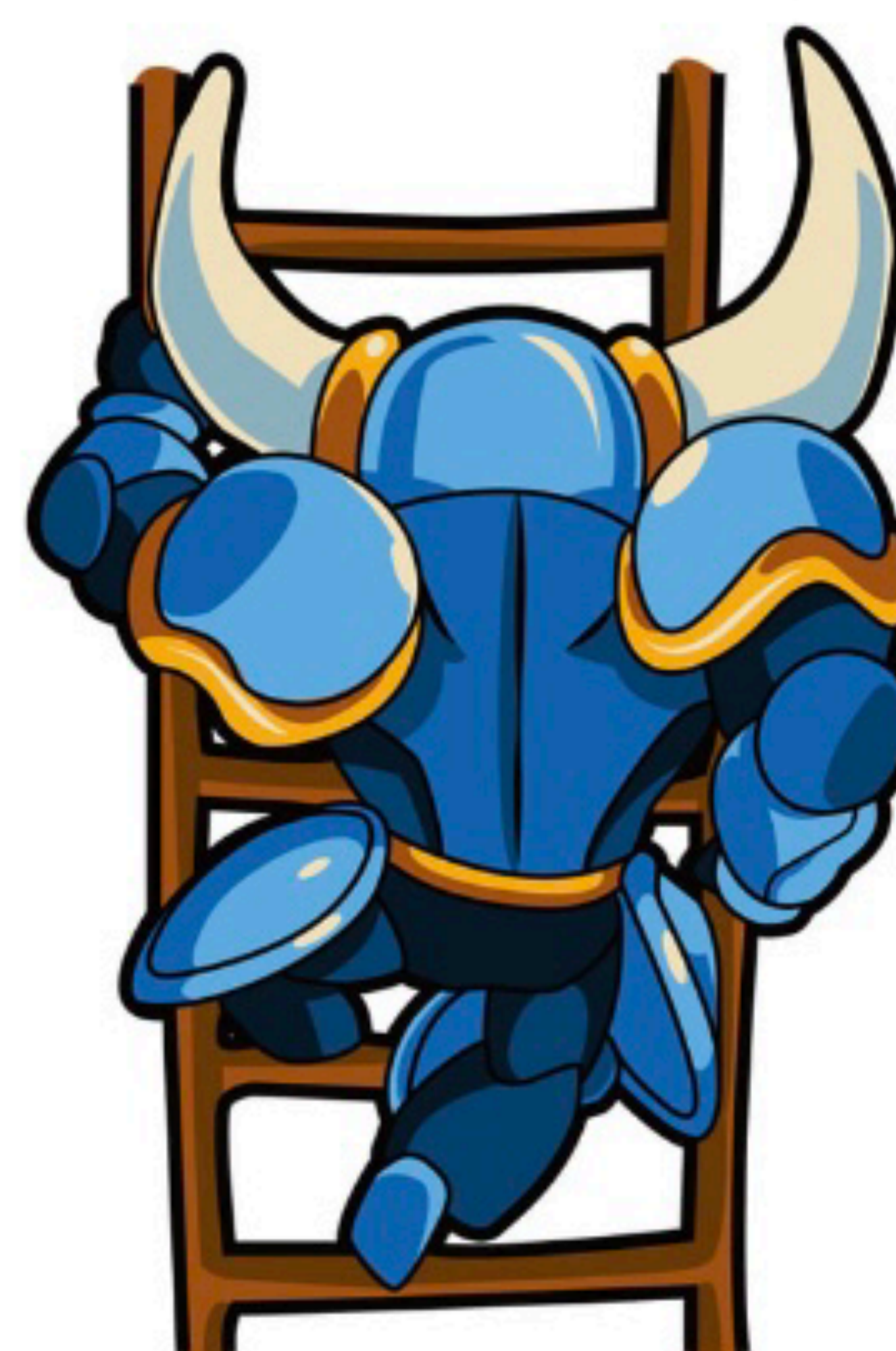
CHALLENGE

Shovel Knight sitting at a campfire was one of the first iconic images we made. We imagined he would sit by the campfire and reflect on his adventures while trying to find his beloved!

### DEV. COMMENTARY



CONVERSATION



LADDER







DIGGING



FLARE WAND



STANDING



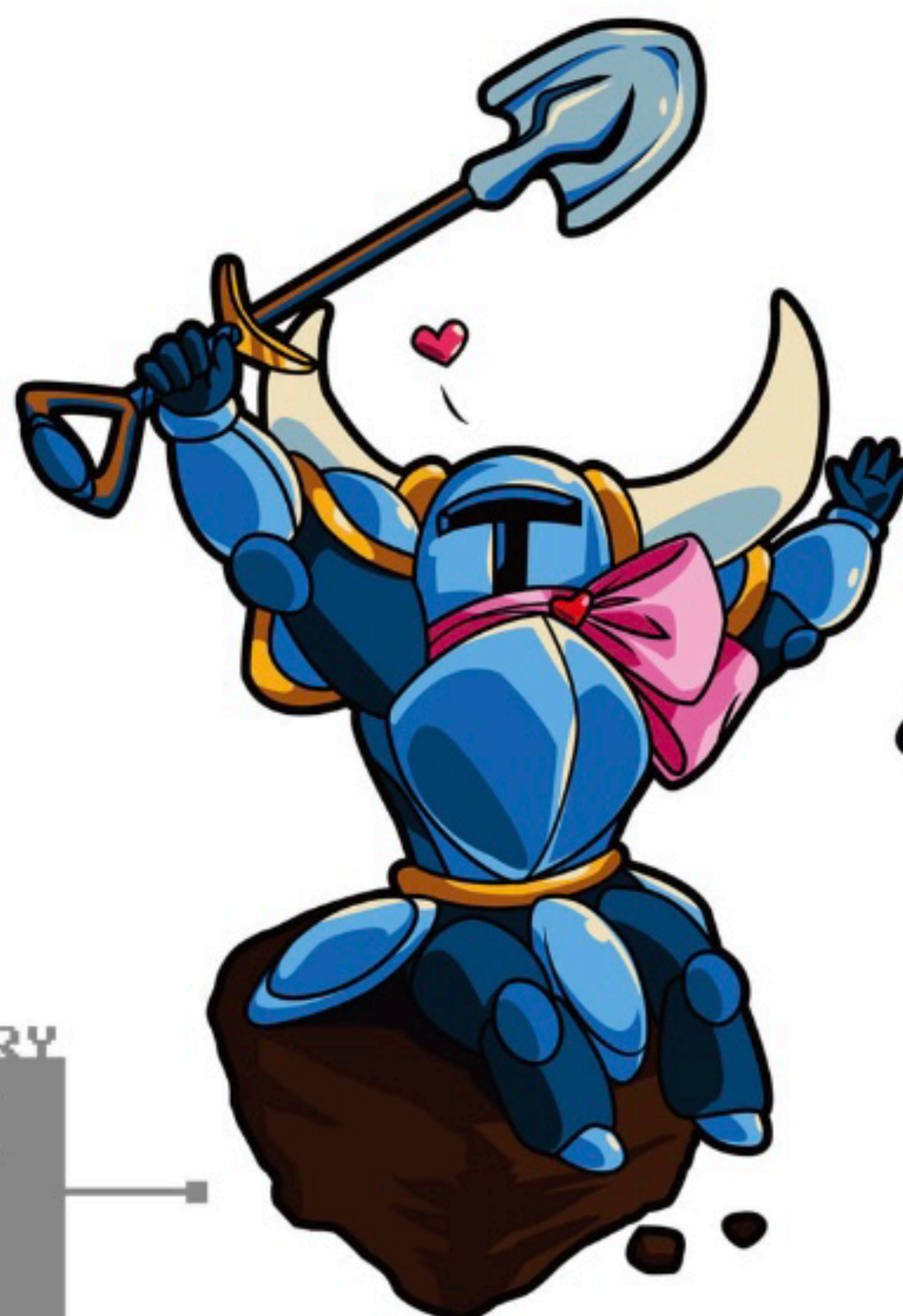
SHOVEL READY



TADA!



READING



PINK RIBBON



SHOVEL DROP

DEV. COMMENTARY

Everyone thinks Shovel Knight is sitting on a dirt block in this Valentine's Day illustration, but it's actually a brownie!



◆ ADDITIONAL KEY ART



JUMP  
-CONFIDENT-



JUMP  
-SUPER CONFIDENT-



JUMP  
-MAX CONFIDENCE-



JUMP  
-ATTACK READY-



SHRUG



LEAPING





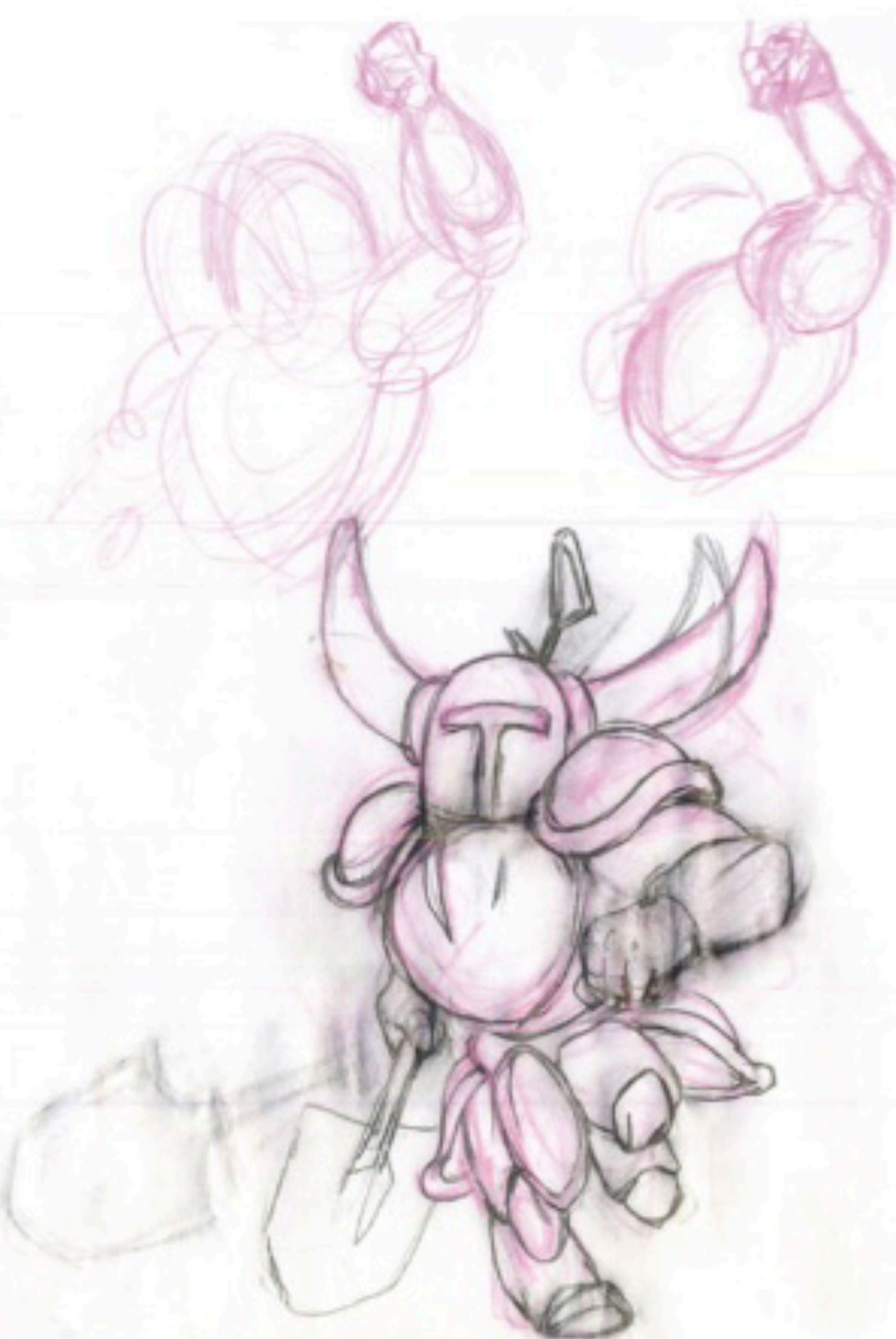
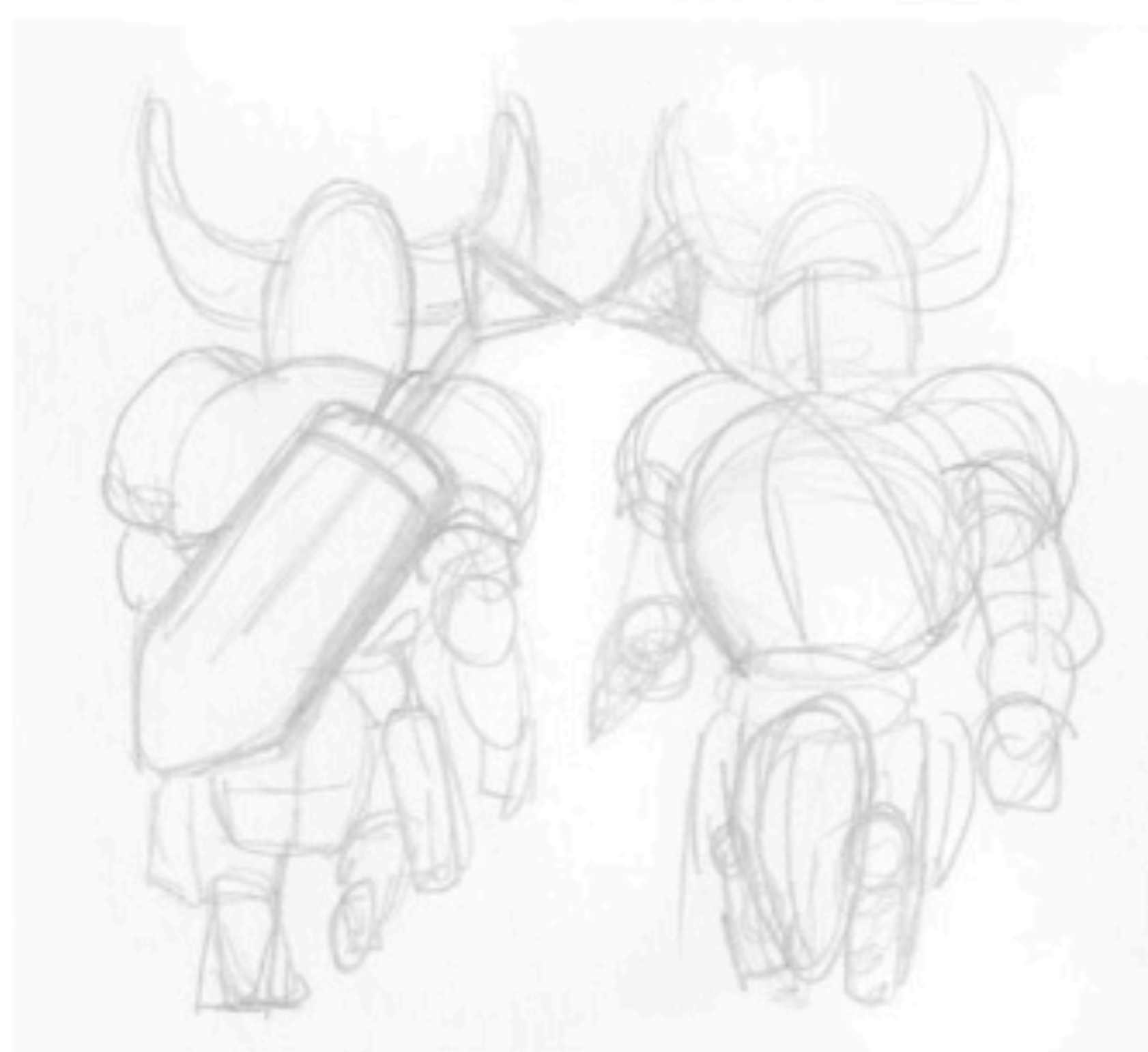
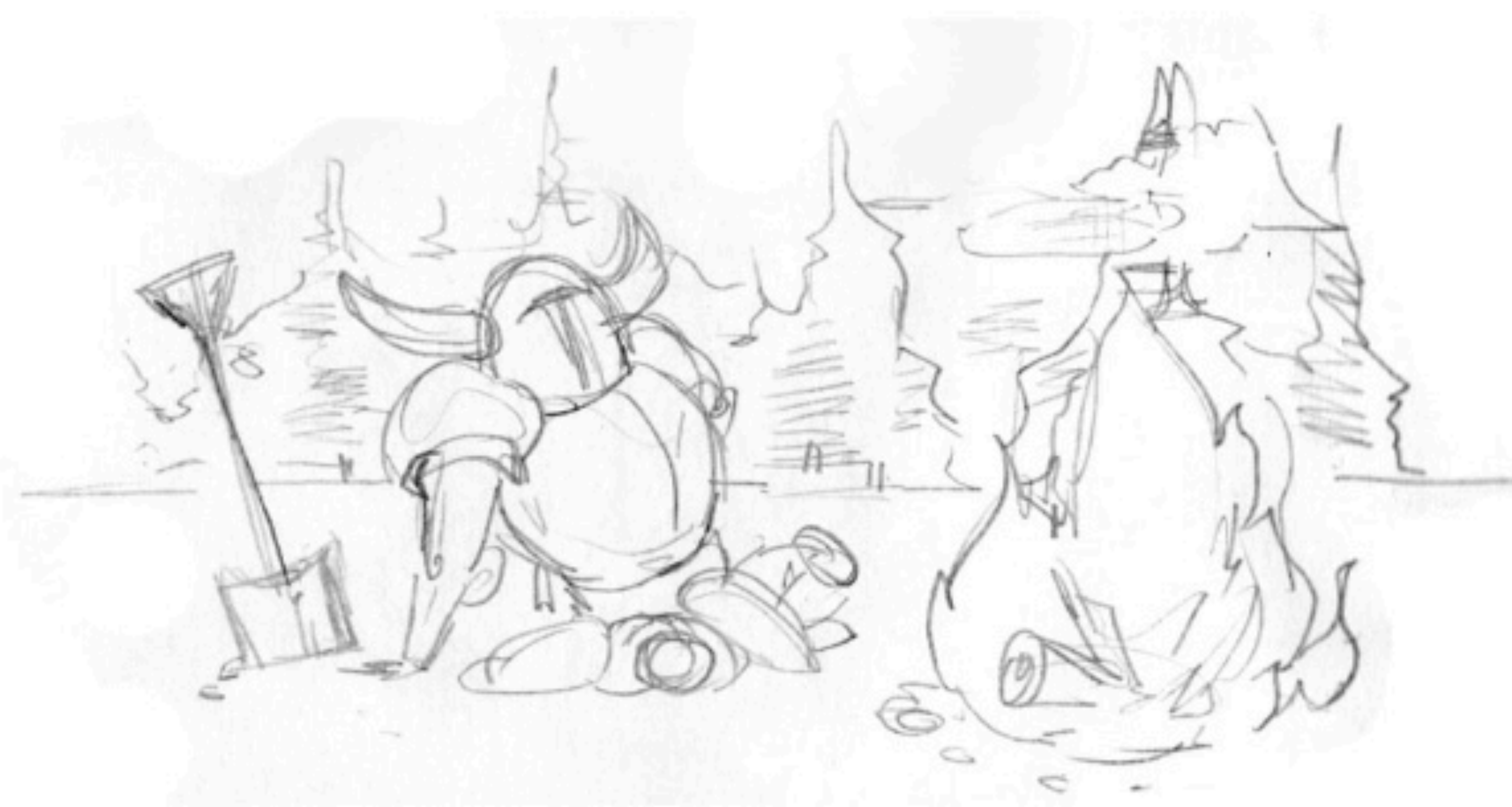
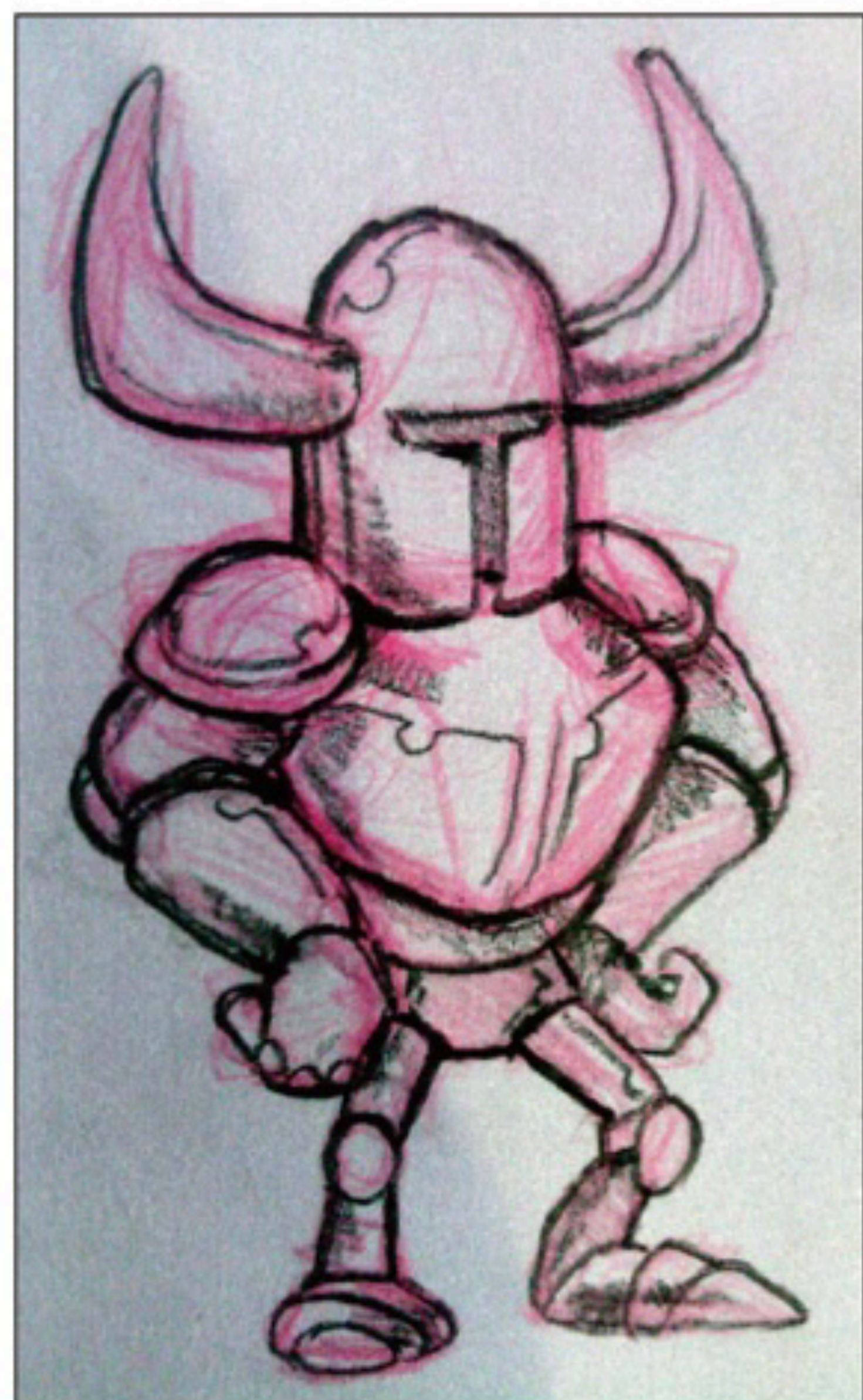


#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*It can be difficult to interpret a character fully from their sprite. We chose to use the second screen on Nintendo platforms to show off how Shovel Knight looks in more detail.*

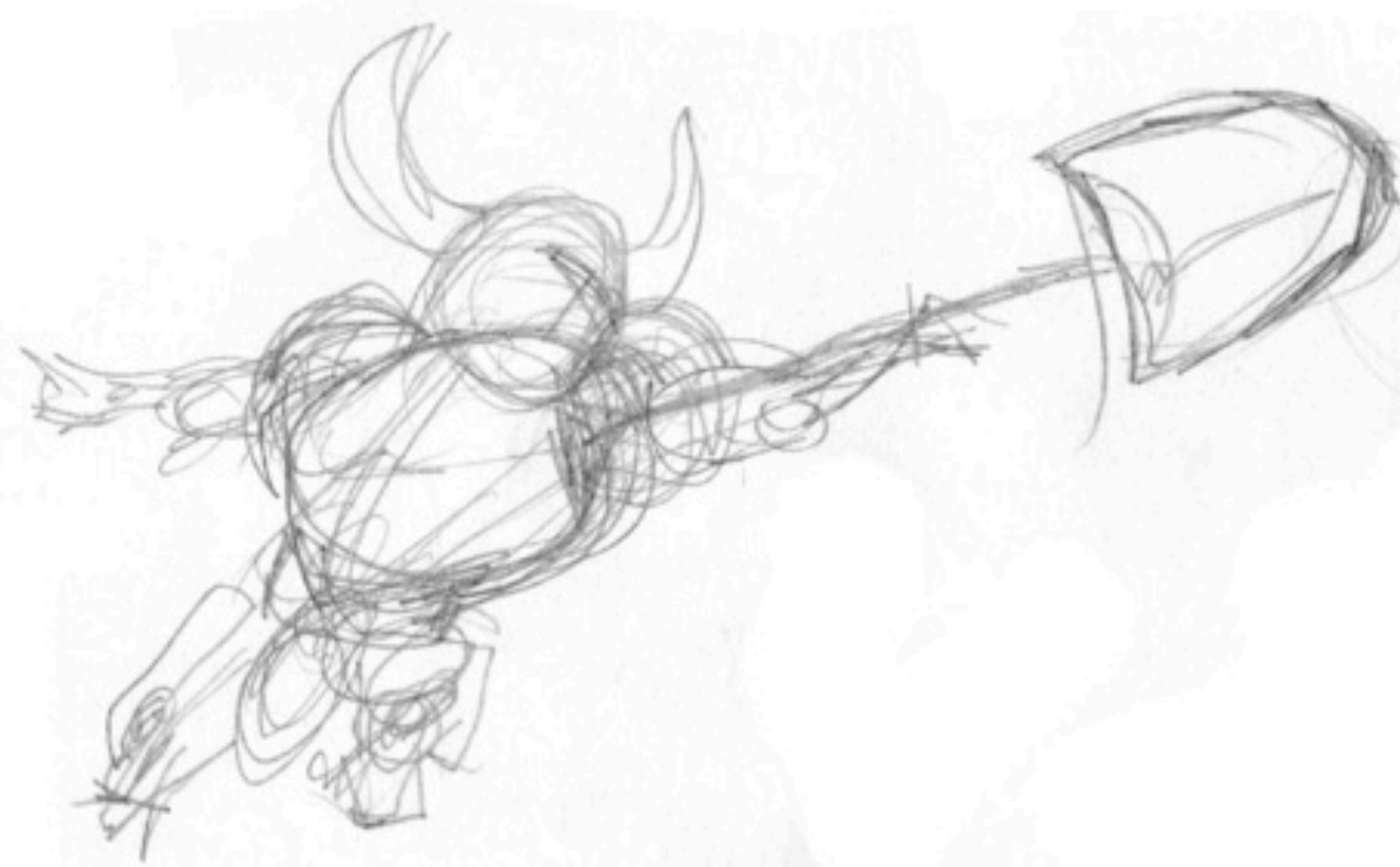


## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES

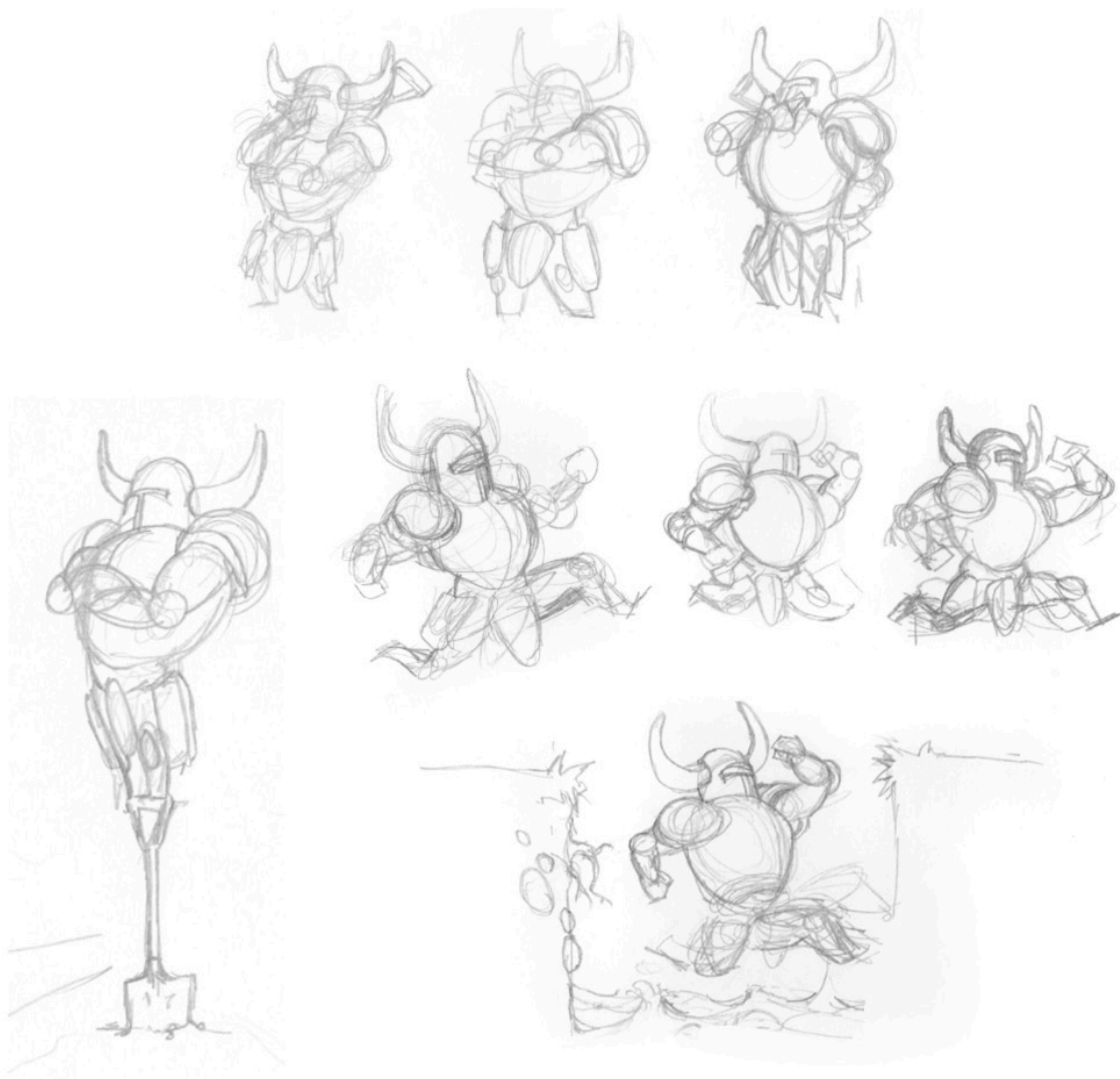


### DEV. COMMENTARY

Despite how consistent Shovel Knight's design stayed throughout the project, at one point he had a sheath for his Shovel Blade.







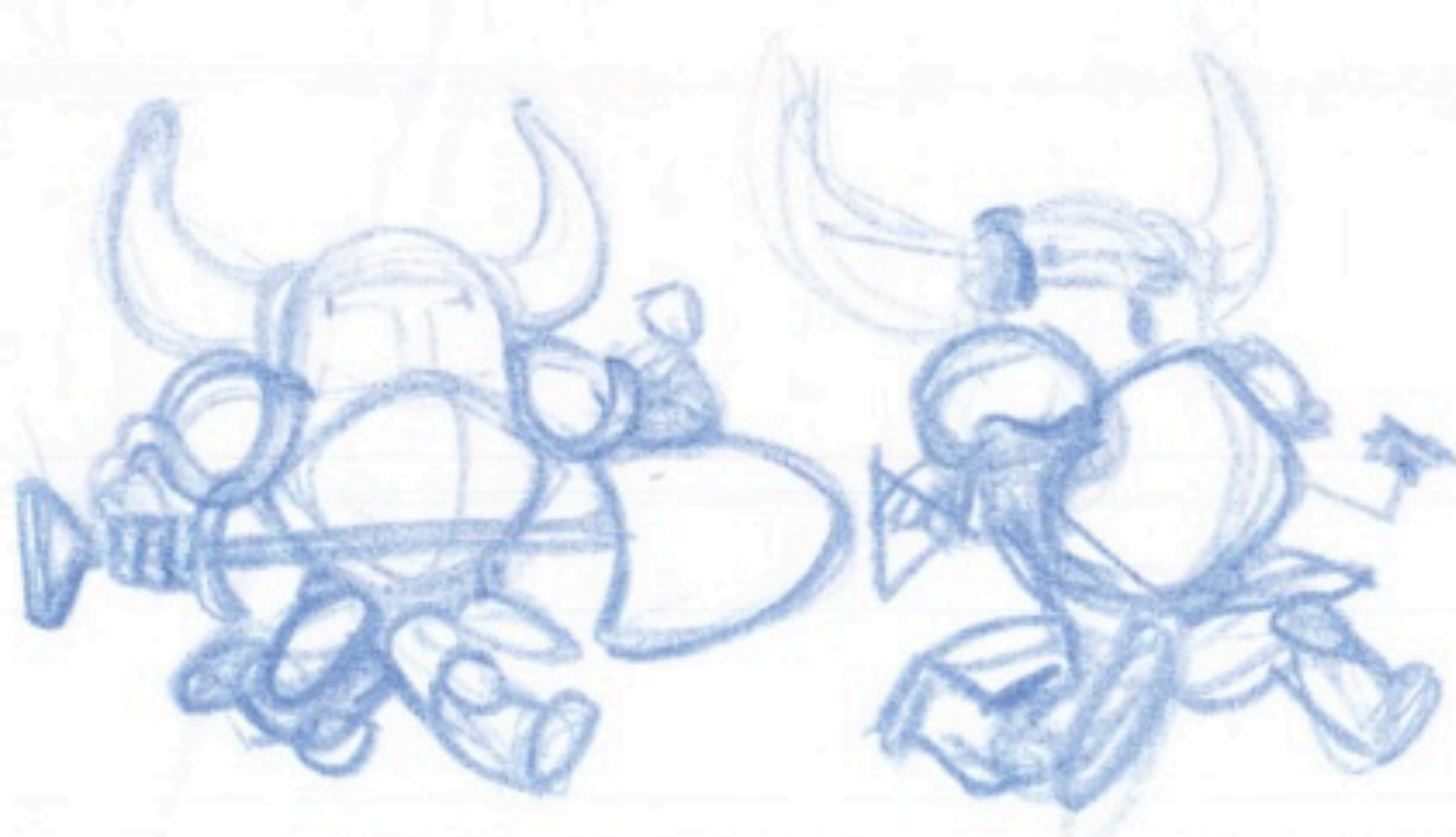
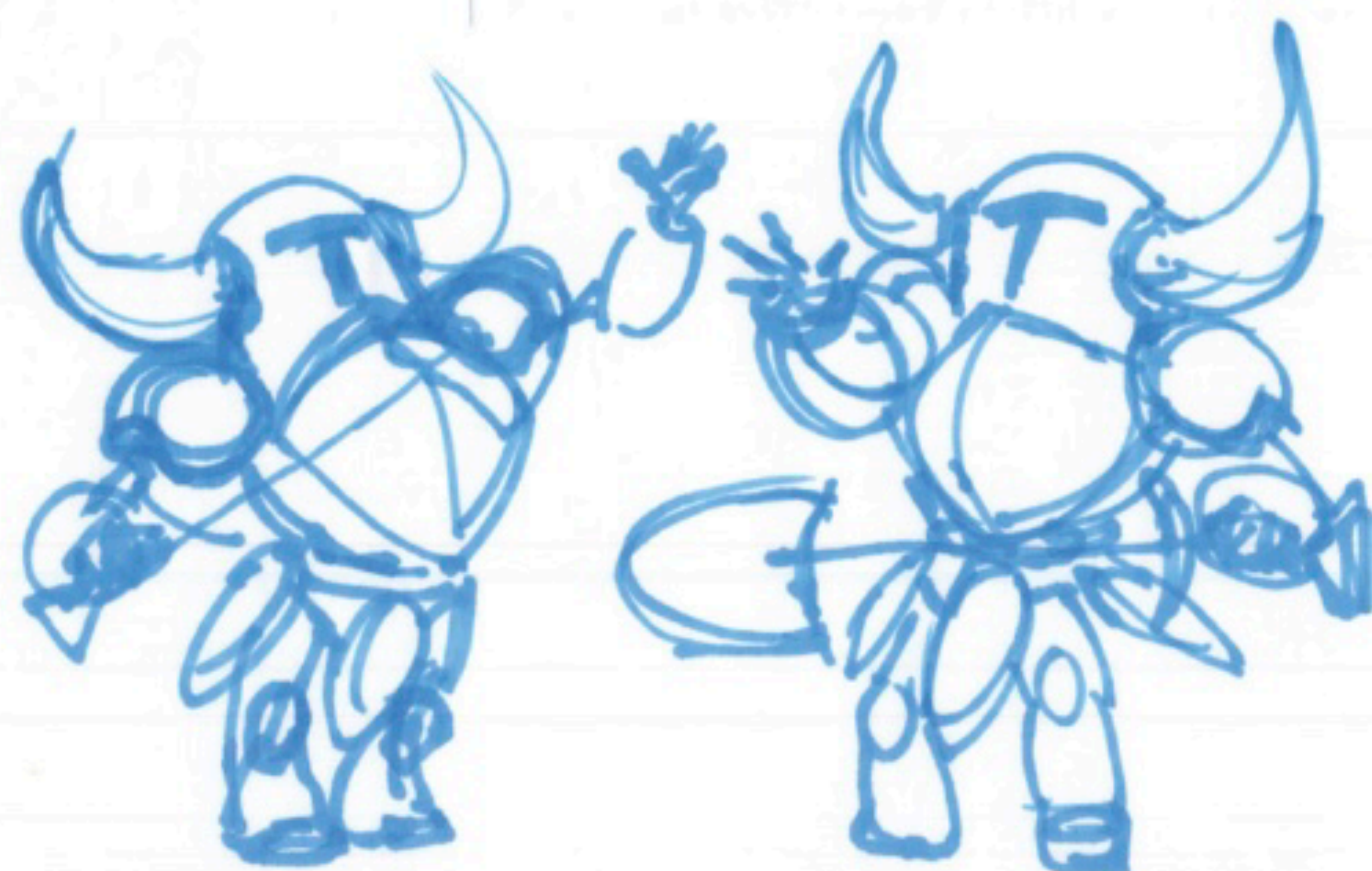
#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We designed the gameplay around Shovel Knight's actions and what we imagined would be fun for the player to do. Early on, we explored all kinds of different ideas, like "He could stand on the shovel!" or "He could shovel food into his mouth!" A lot of ideas weren't used, but they were still helpful for us in terms of understanding Shovel Knight's personality.





## DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



CHARACTERS AND WORLD











# SHIELD KNIGHT



◆ KEY ART 1



◆ KEY ART 2

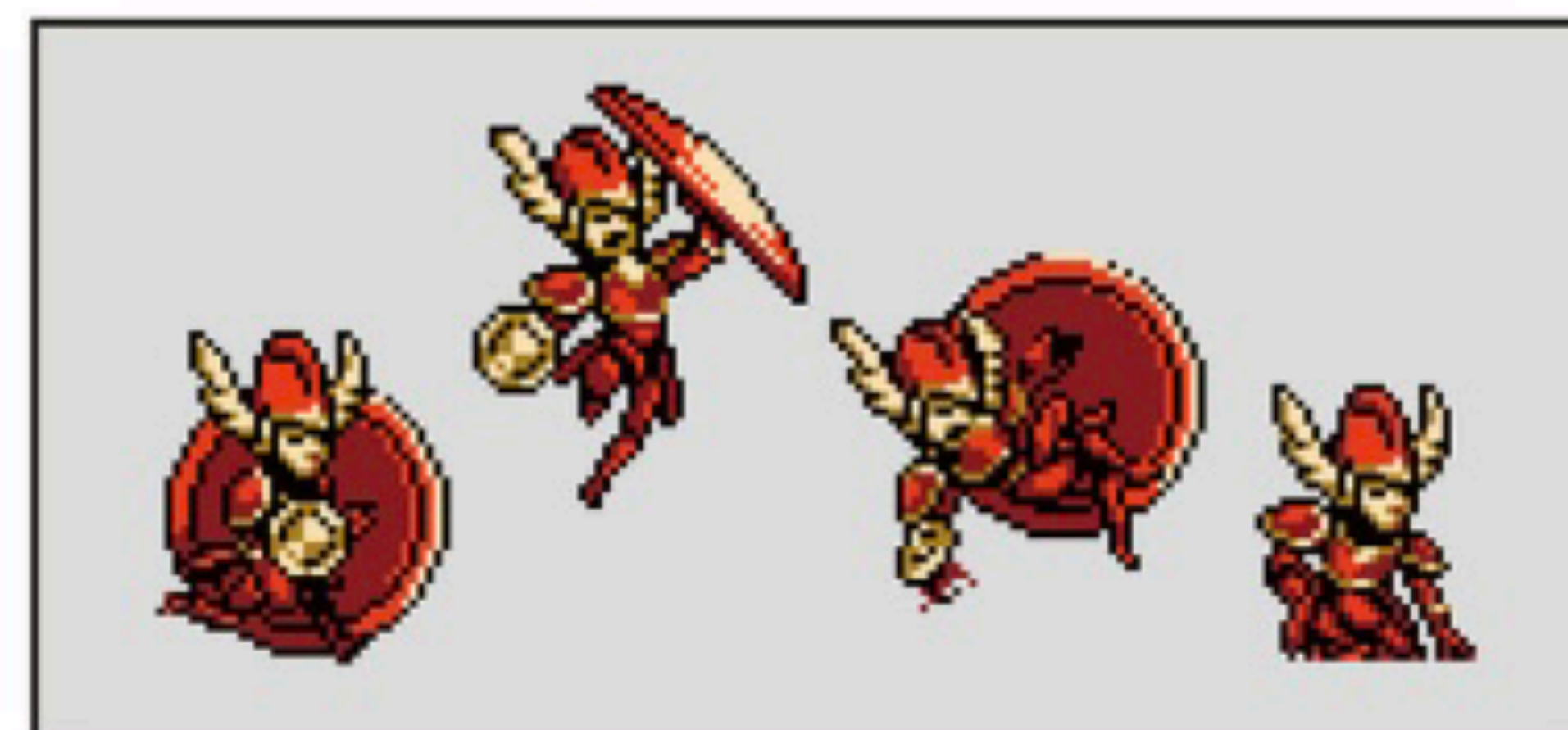


◆ KEY ART 3

Often, the best offense is a good defense, and Shield Knight knows it. Wielding a pair of Asymmetrical Shields, she deflects both melee and projectile attacks easily before getting into range and crushing her foes! For years, Shield Knight and Shovel Knight were inseparable partners in adventuring; with their expert use of unconventional weapons, they worked as one. Now, Shield Knight's fate is unknown, but Shovel Knight's goal is clear: he must journey to find Shield Knight, his lost beloved.

- Pros: Confident, powerful, tenacious
- Cons: Occasional recklessness

## ■ GAME SPRITES







◆ KEY ART 4



#### DEV. COMMENTARY

This is the first time we've shown the concept art for Shield Knight without her helmet!

◆ WITHOUT HELMET

#### ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We intended for Shield Knight to be a partner, rather than a princess in need of saving. Early on, we even envisioned her as a Valkyrie-like character with a spear and winged helmet. The wings were incorporated into her final design, but her armor became more similar to Shovel Knight's over time.





# BLACK KNIGHT



◆ KEY ART 1

As the yin to Shovel Knight's yang, the Black Knight calls nobody master. Clad in obsidian armor, he hounds Shovel Knight to the ends of the earth, spoiling for a battle. The Black Knight's skill with the Shovel Blade rivals that of Shovel Knight, or so the Black Knight hopes to prove! While Shovel Knight is confused as to why he has this mysteriously relentless doppelganger, no number of humiliating defeats by Shovel Knight could dampen the Black Knight's spirit: he will always rise up to fight again!

- Pros: Persistent, confident, goal-oriented
- Cons: Slightly inept, squeaky voice

## DEV. COMMENTARY

*We wanted to have a darker, more evil version of Shovel Knight to function as a rival, which led to the creation of Black Knight.*



◆ KEY ART 2

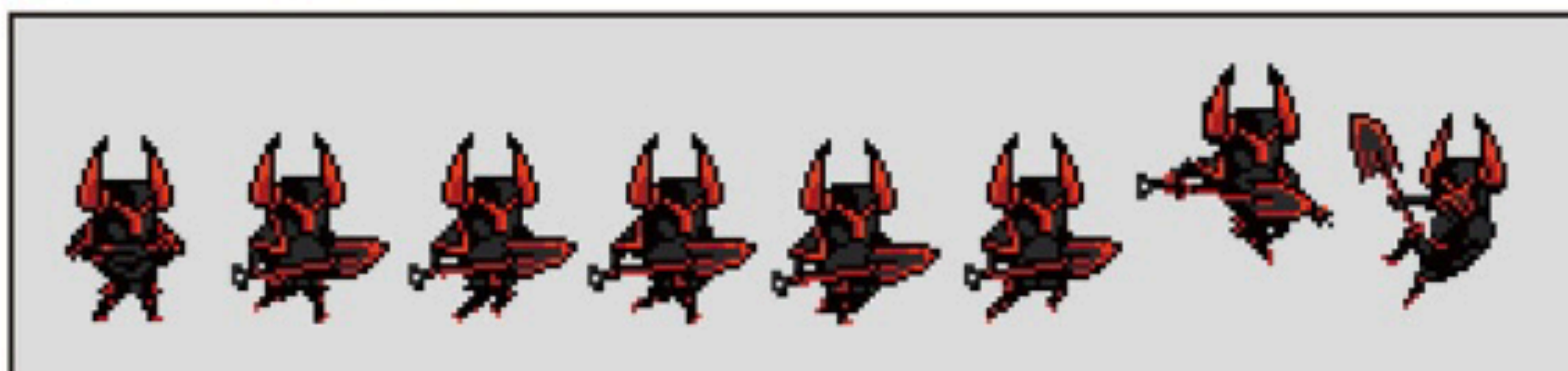


◆ KEY ART 3



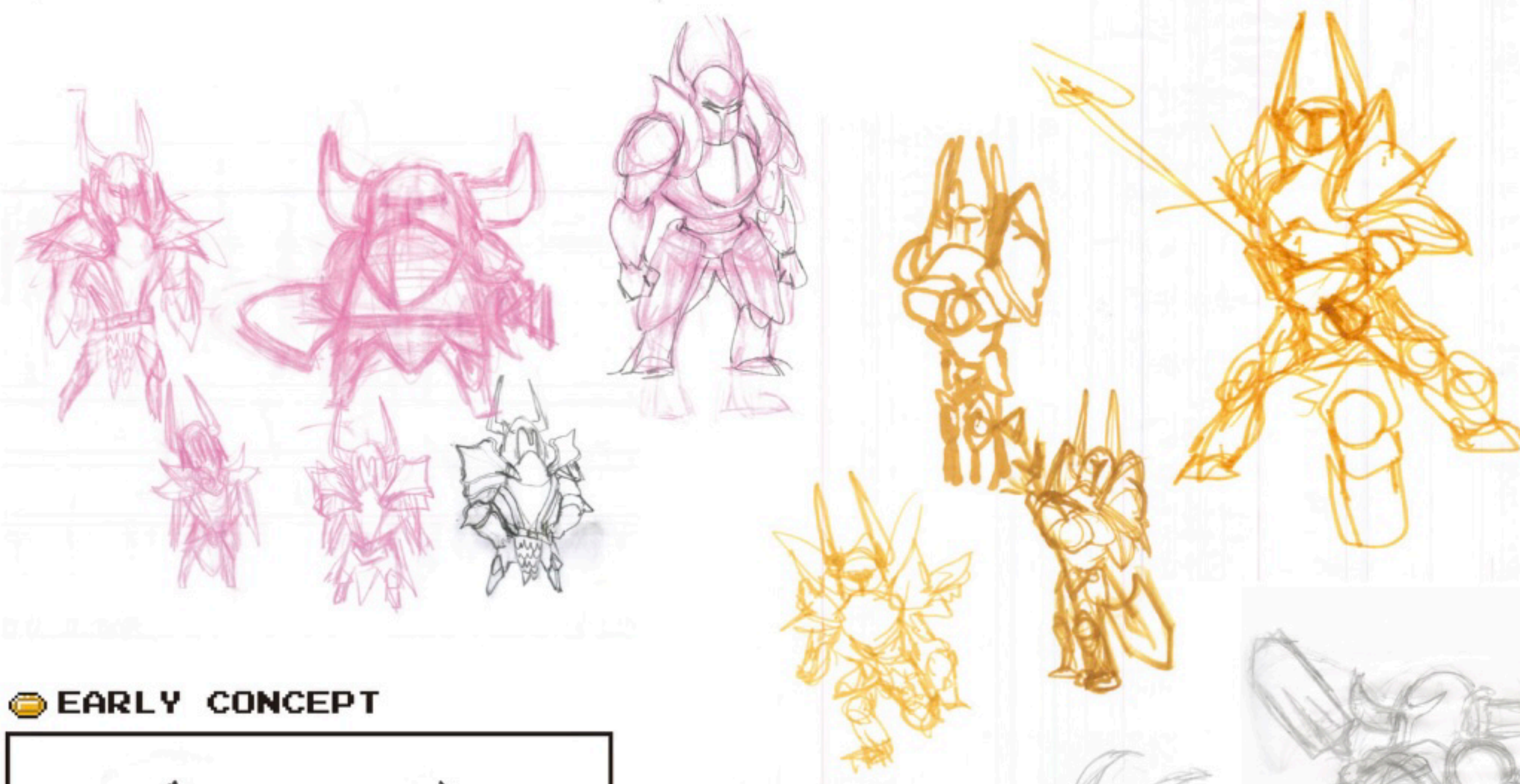
◆ KEY ART 4

## ■ GAME SPRITES

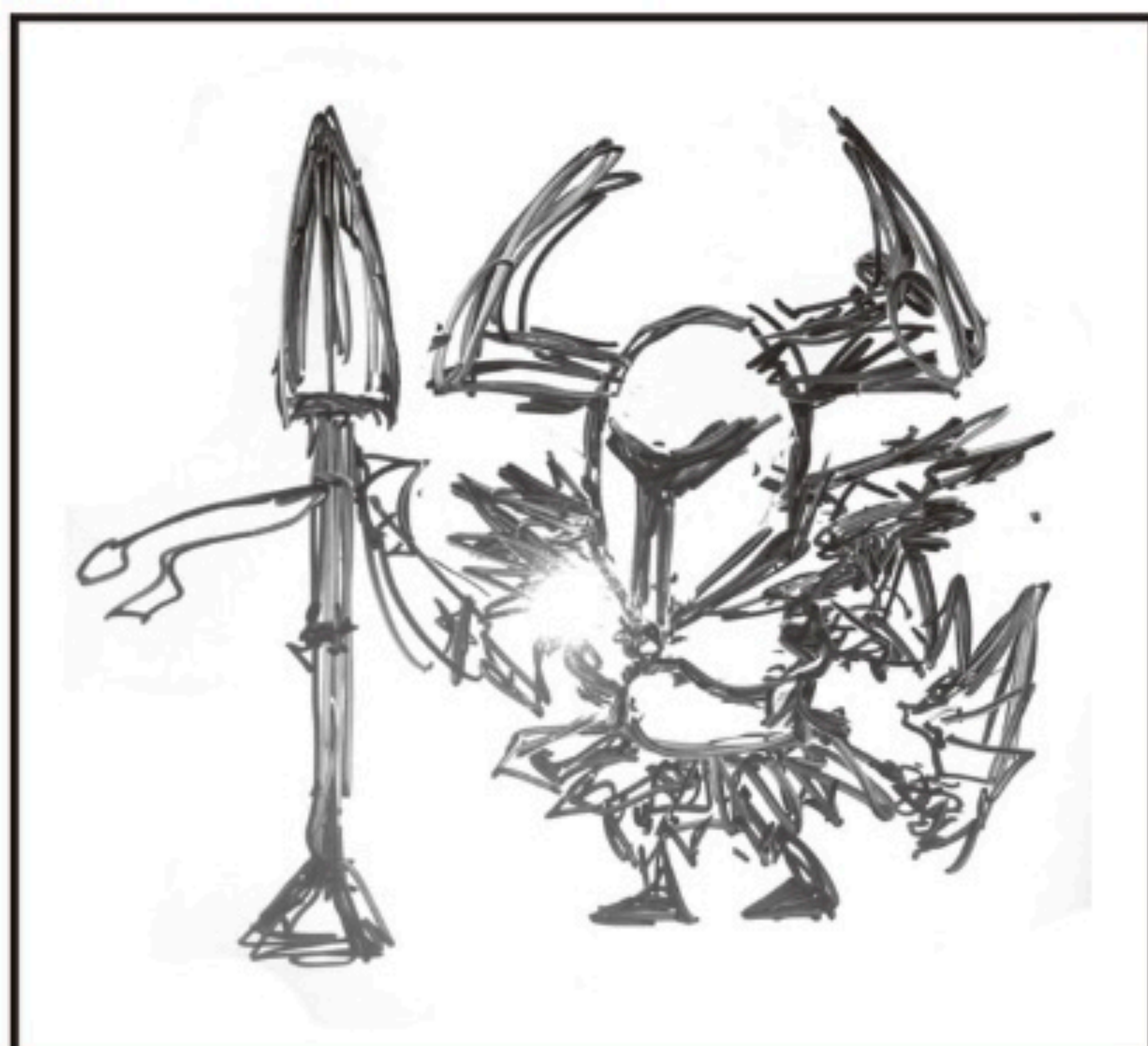




## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



## ● EARLY CONCEPT



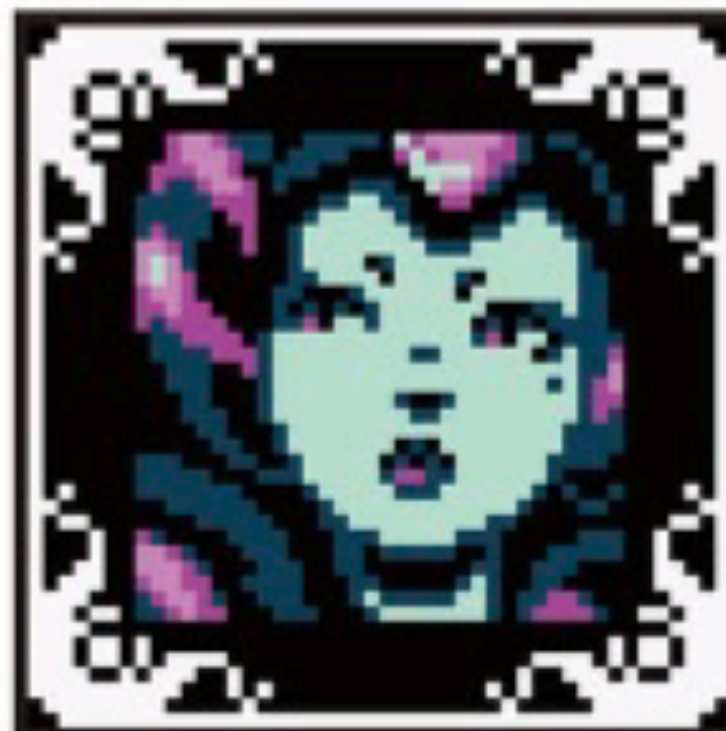
## “GIGA” BLACK KNIGHT



## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

When we were designing Giga Black Knight, we pulled inspiration from the over-the-top designs of Final Fantasy bosses and anime characters. This was toned down in the end.





# THE ENCHANTRESS



◆ KEY ART 1

Of all the monsters roaming Shovel Knight's world, none are as dangerous as the Enchantress. Cold, brilliant, and pulsing with vile power, the Enchantress is a preternatural force. Her Order of No Quarter carries out her will with ruthless might, although her origins remain shrouded in mystery. With a loyal army under her command, she is more than a match for a solitary knight with a lowly shovel... or so she assumes!

- Pros: Intelligence, magical prowess, healthy glow
- Cons: No sense of humor, seems sad sometimes...

## ■ GAME SPRITES



◆ KEY ART 2



◆ KEY ART 4



◆ KEY ART 3

## DEV. COMMENTARY

The Enchantress' forehead amulet was devised as a target to hit, as it felt wrong for Shovel Knight to directly harm someone he cares about.





## DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES

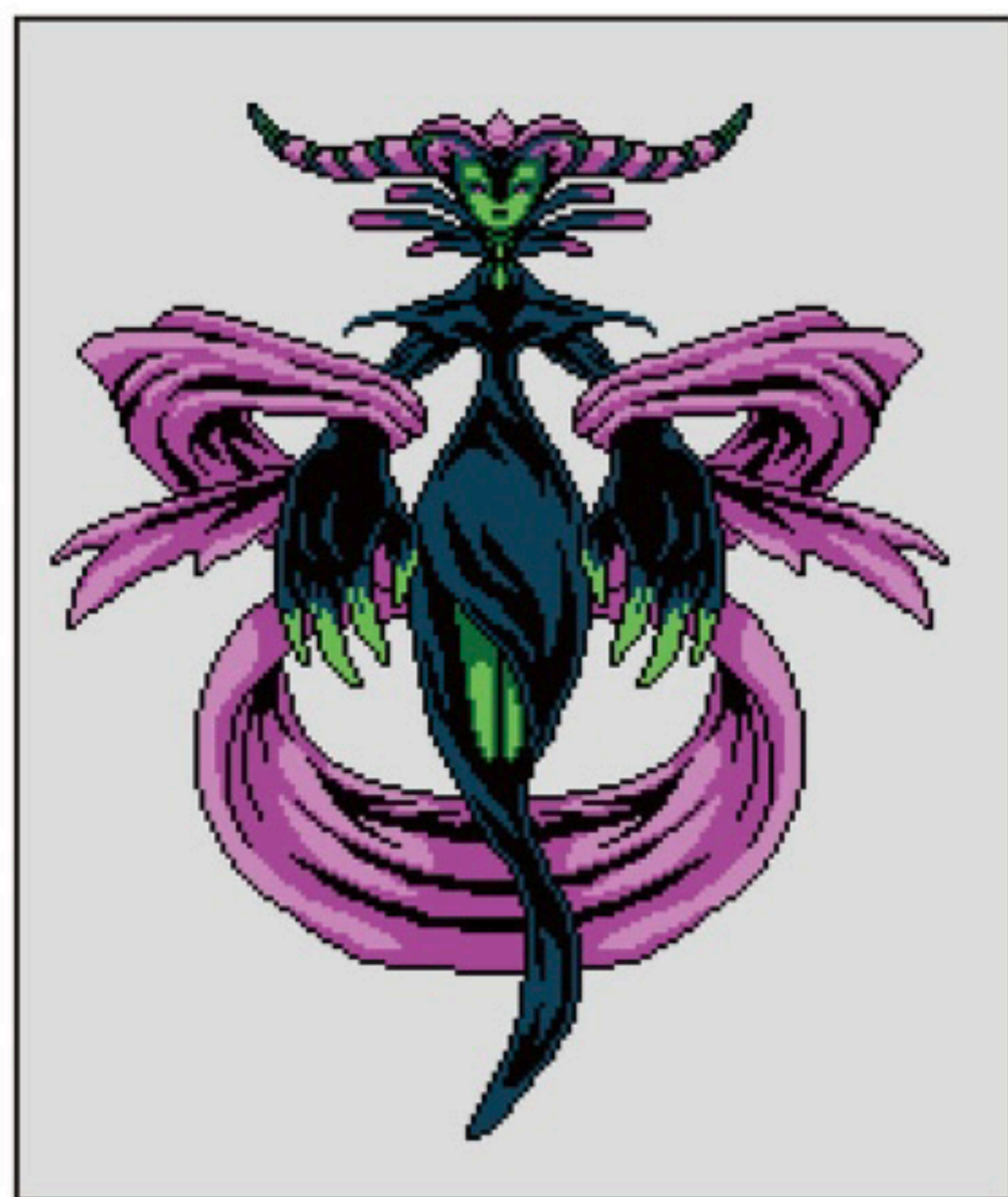


### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

The Enchantress went through many revisions as we tried to capture the right mix of danger, aloofness, and sex appeal. Originally, she had a low-cut neckline and exposed back, but it didn't feel quite right!



## REMNANT OF FATE







# KING KNIGHT



◆ KEY ART 1

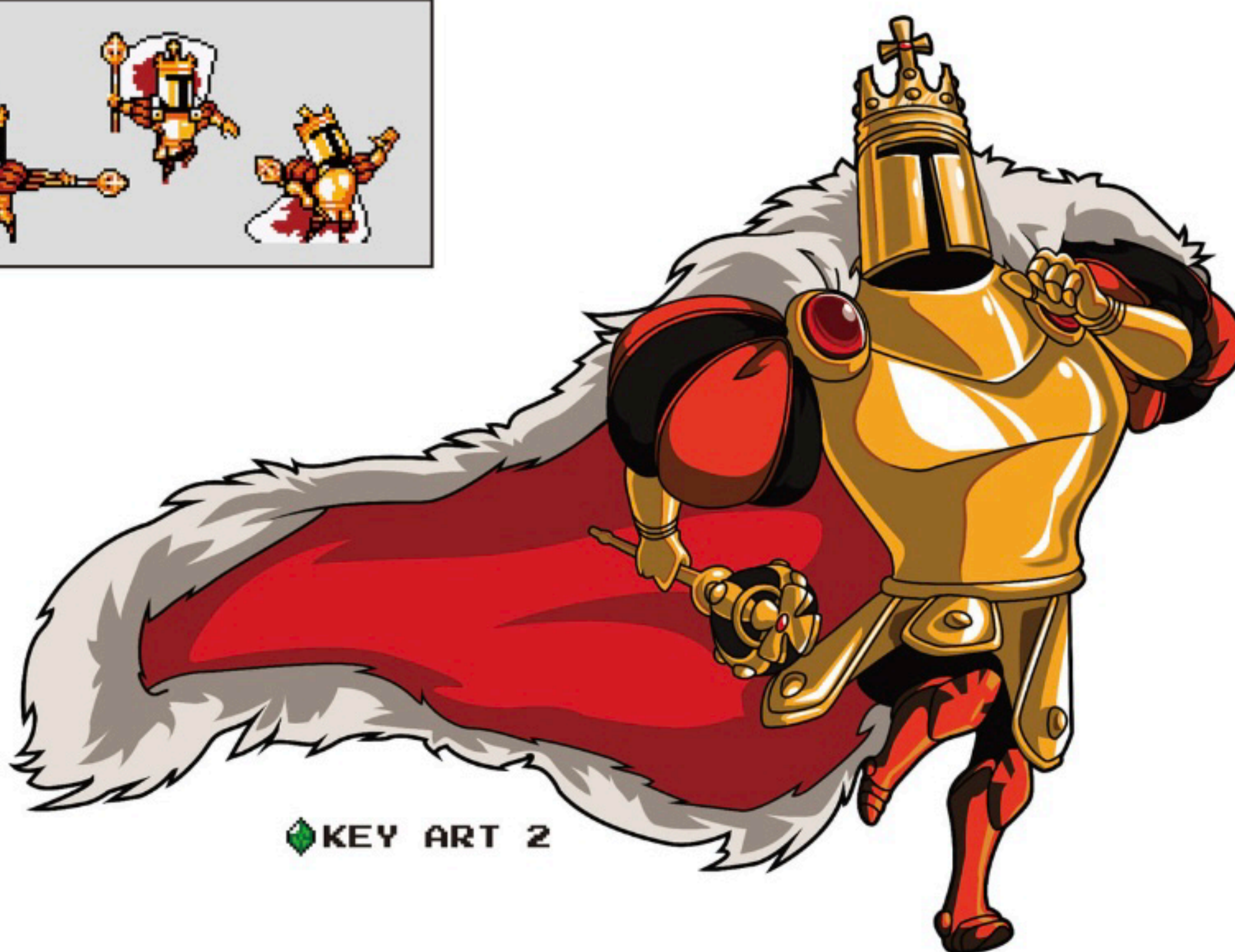
King Knight isn't a king, he is a king-themed knight. But that doesn't stop him from making decrees! As the lord defender of Pridemoor Keep, he commands a formidable army of minions. Experienced with repelling invaders who dare to try and topple his malevolent monarchy, King Knight is a master of single combat. And because he's dressed to the nines at almost all times, he's always ready for a brutal coronation!

- Pros: Charismatic, snappy dresser, commanding presence
- Cons: Not actually a king

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*King Knight was the first boss we brought from concept to implementation. He helped solidify the game's humor and overall tone. "He's a king, but he's ALSO a knight? Then what even IS a knight?"*

## GAME SPRITES

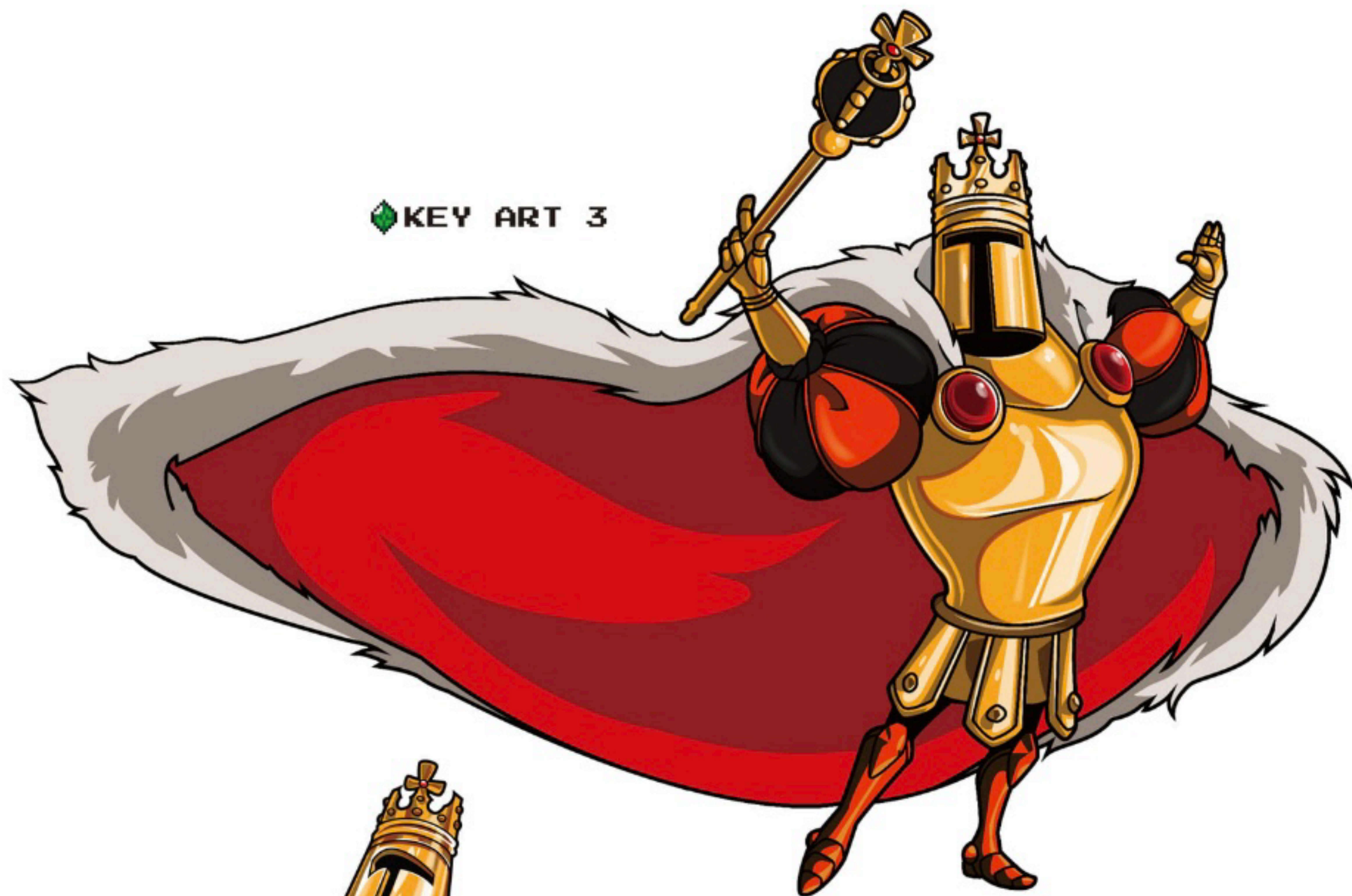


◆ KEY ART 2





◆ KEY ART 3

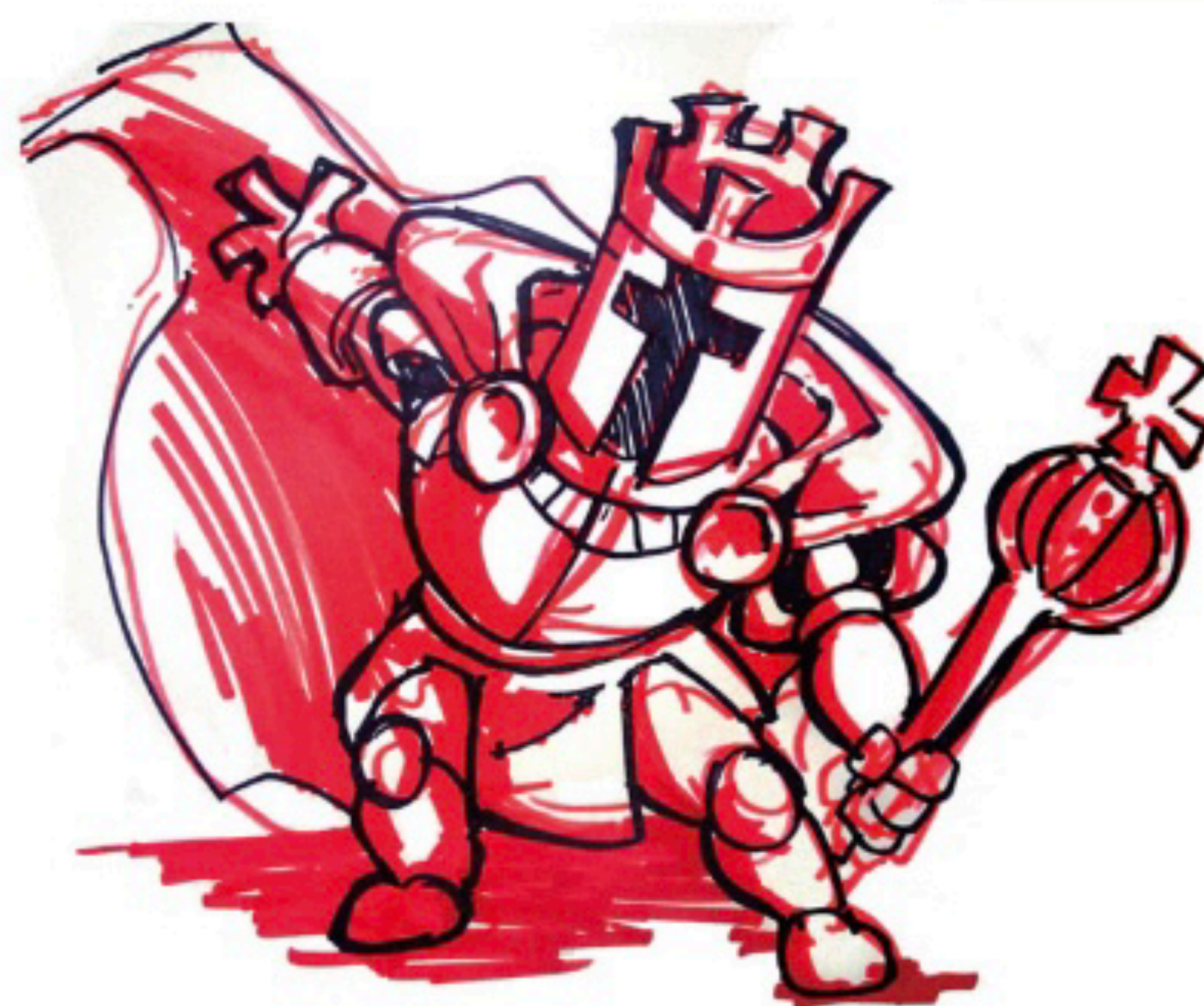
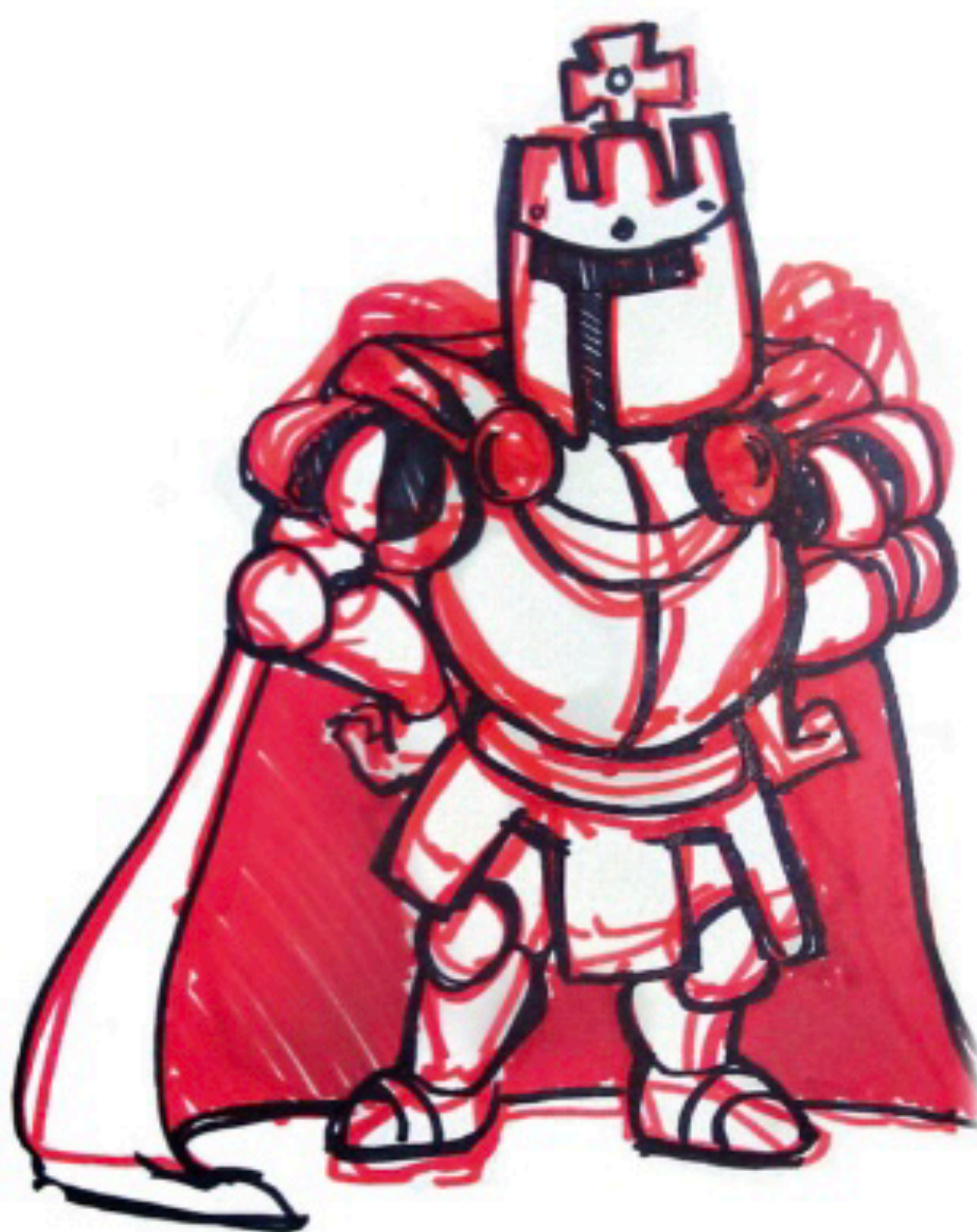


◆ BUST SHOT

● EARLY CONCEPT



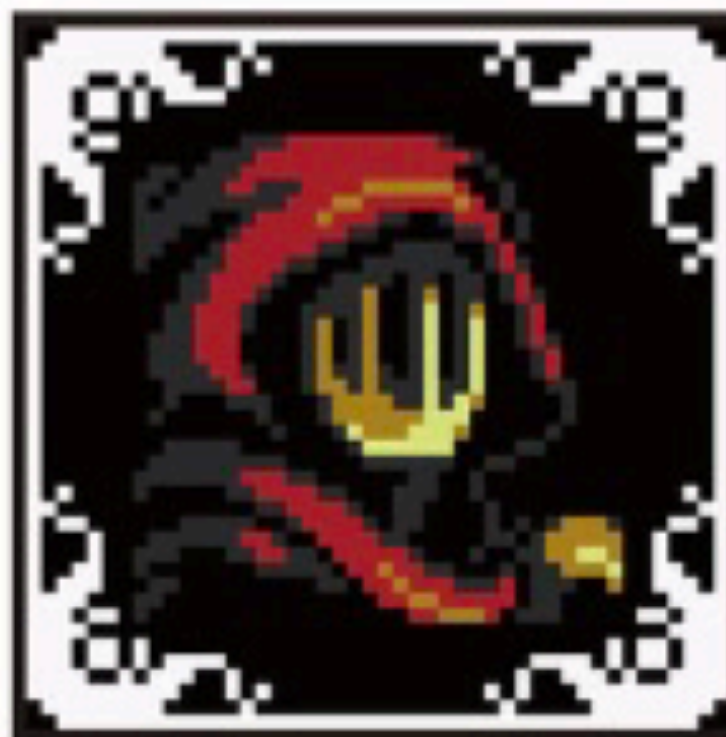
◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



#### DEV. COMMENTARY

Initially, we planned on designing all the bosses with similar proportions to Shovel Knight. As we continued on, however, that felt too limiting as we strove for more diverse designs.





# SPECTER KNIGHT



KEY ART 1

In life, Specter Knight was a cruel and cunning warrior. And although his blood is now icy cold, he is no less formidable as a phantasm. The most begrudgingly loyal knight of the Order, Specter Knight follows the Enchantress only because she is capable of magically extending his undeath. Clutching a grim scythe in his shriveled claws, Specter Knight commands his weapon with uncommon cunning... and his next target is Shovel Knight.

- Pros: Tattered crimson cloak, supernatural scythe, immortality
- Cons: Overly sentimental, tries too hard to act cool

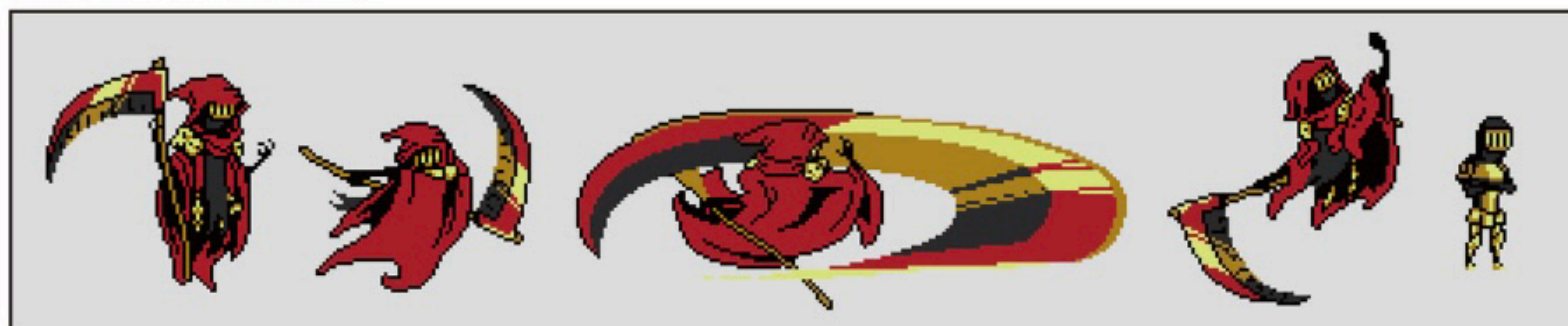


KEY ART 2

KEY ART 3



GAME SPRITES

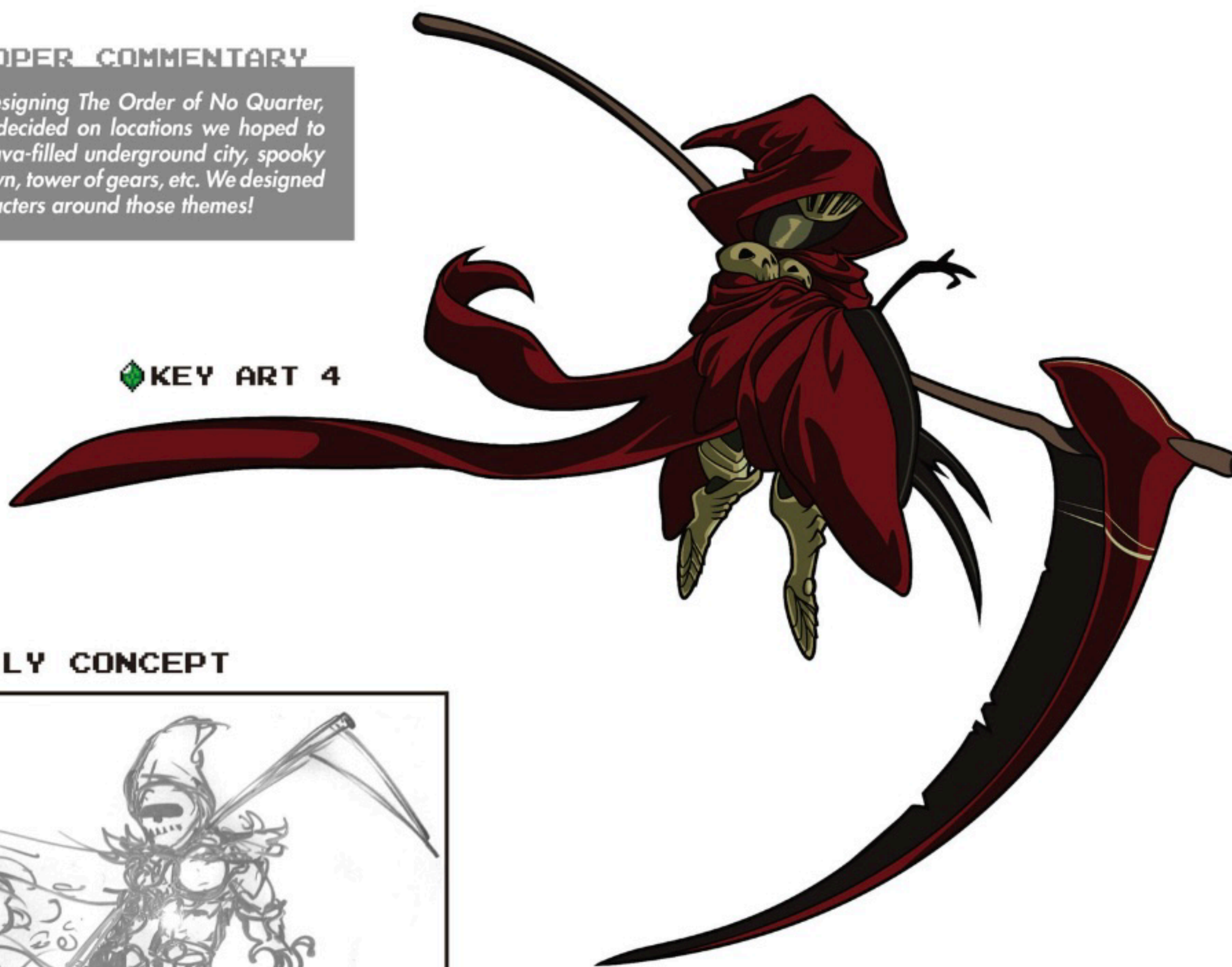




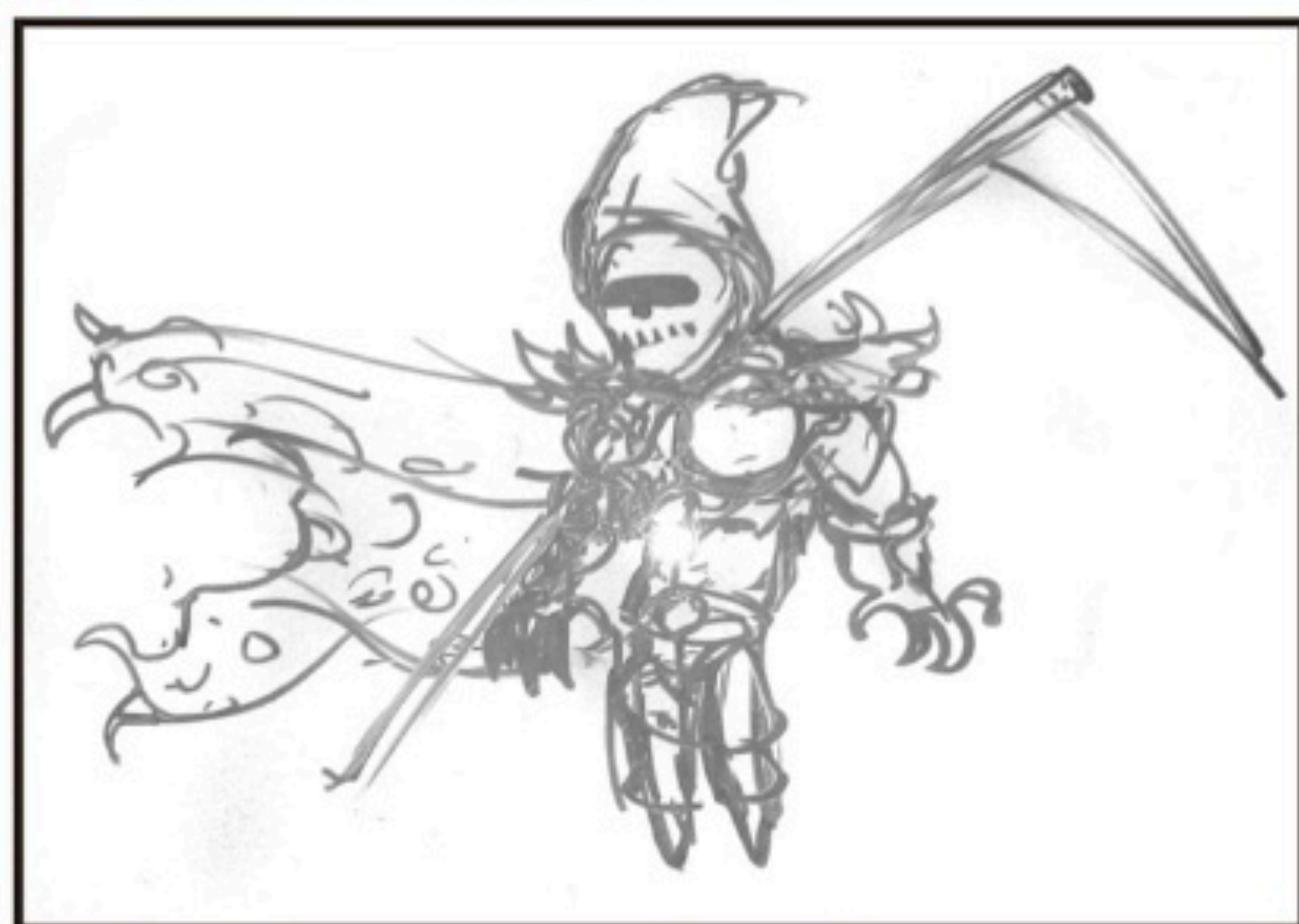
## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

When designing *The Order of No Quarter*, we first decided on locations we hoped to visit: a lava-filled underground city, spooky ghost town, tower of gears, etc. We designed the characters around those themes!

### ◆ KEY ART 4



### 🟡 EARLY CONCEPT



### ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES







# TREASURE KNIGHT



◆ KEY ART 1

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*Rather than going with a traditional bubble-shaped diving helmet, we decided on a more hybrid helmet to help him stand out.*

Towering over most of The Order of No Quarter, Treasure Knight is a tidal terror. A loner by nature, he rules the ocean as captain of the Iron Whale, a prototype underwater vessel. With his retractable anchor cannon and impermeable diving suit, he is at home on the sea floor, where he spends his days hunting down ancient relics. Just keep your hands off his hard-earned lucre... or you'll find yourself floating home!

- Pros: Can handle extreme physical and mental pressure
- Cons: Greedy, unintelligible while wearing helmet

## ■ GAME SPRITES



◆ KEY ART 3

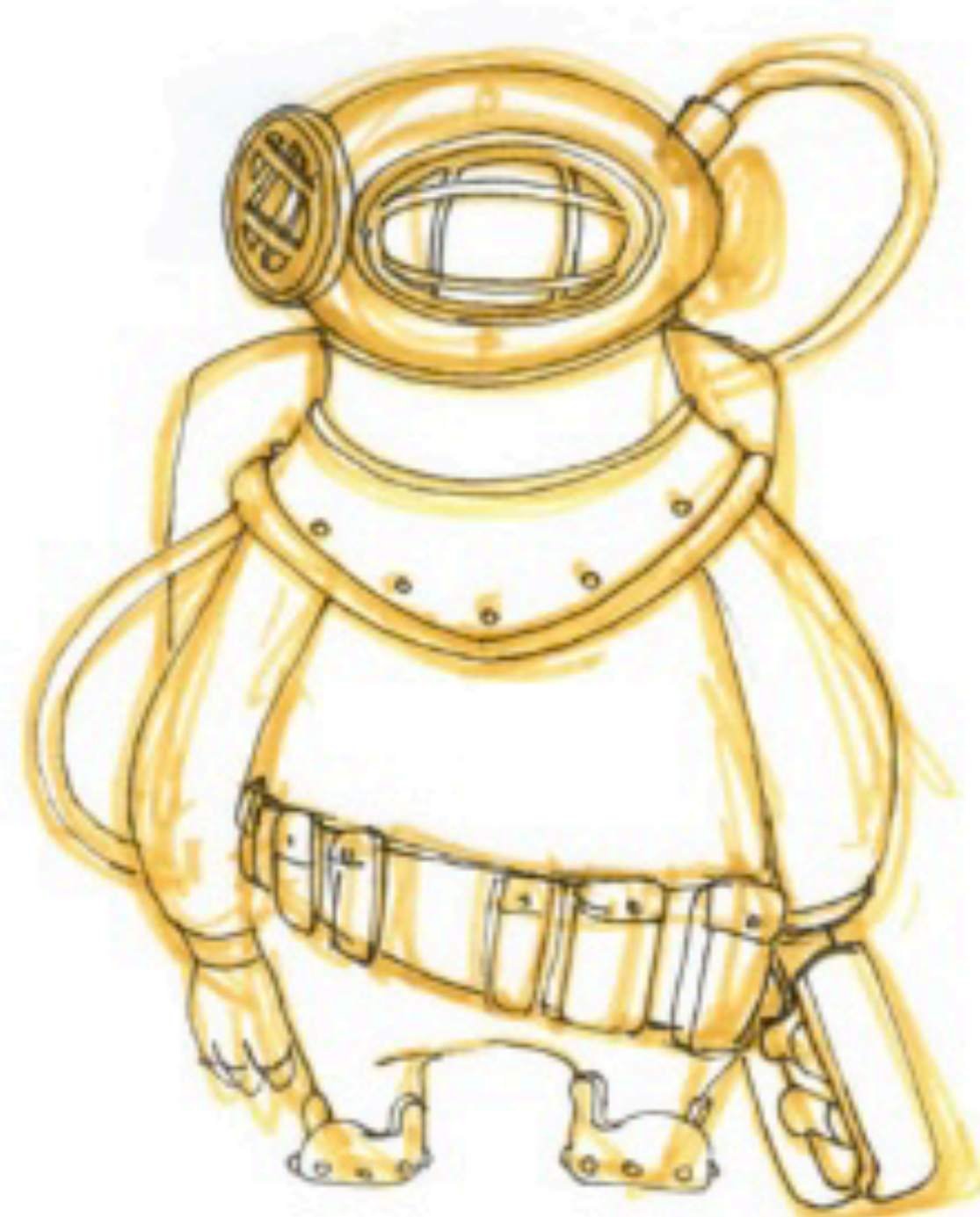


◆ KEY ART 2





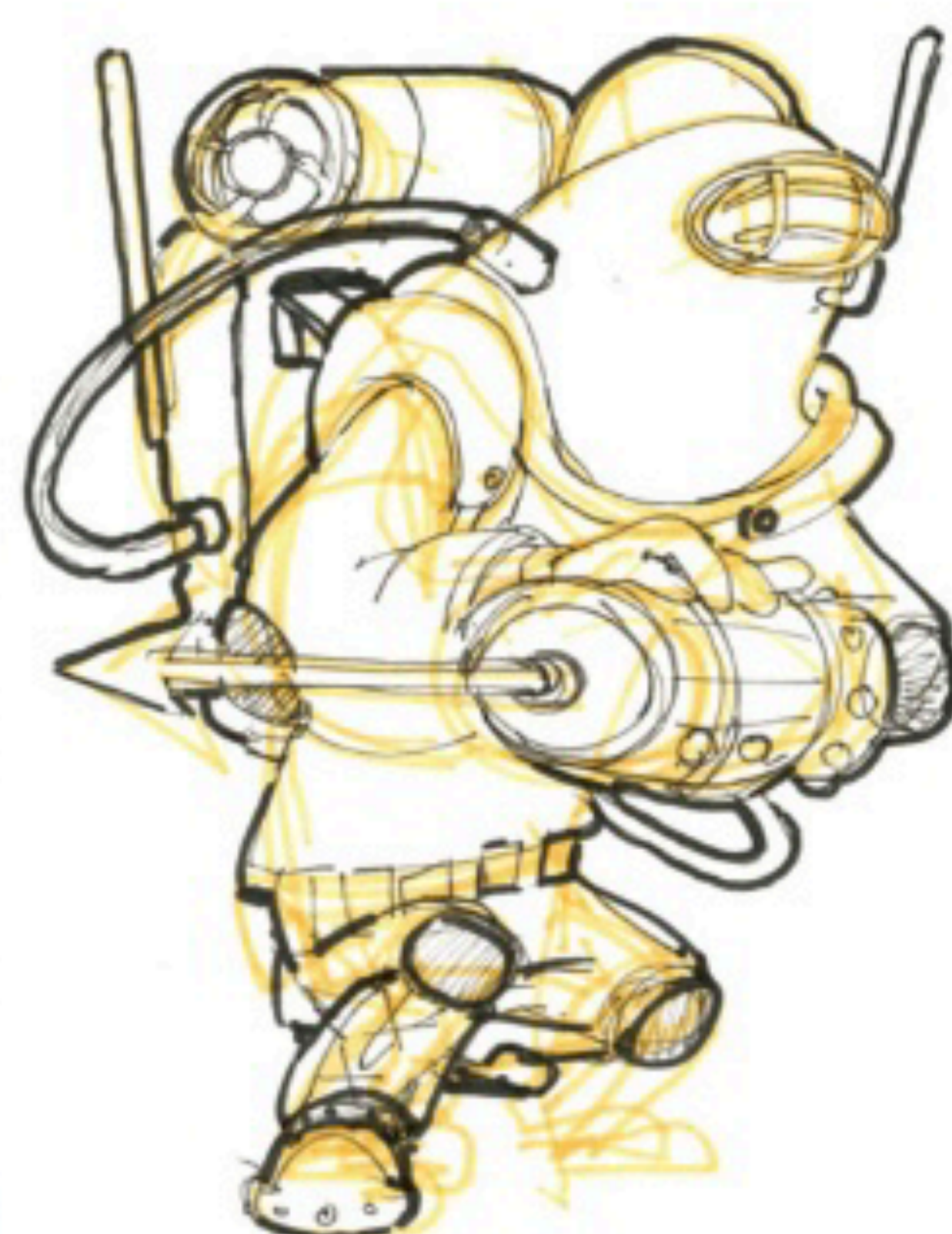
## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



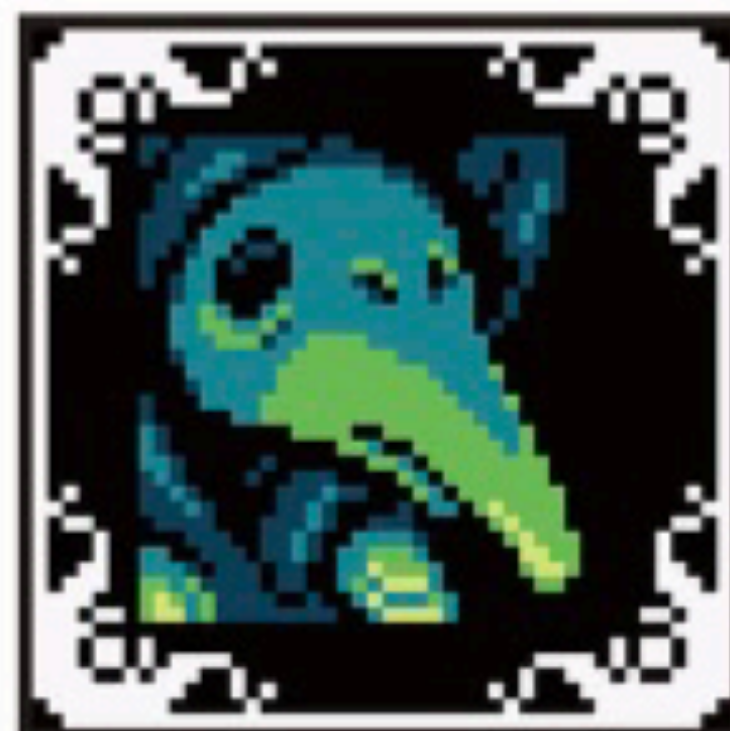
### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We talked a lot about Treasure Knight's weapon. Would he throw a spear and stick you with it, or would he use an anchor to pull you in?

### ● EARLY CONCEPT







# PLAGUE KNIGHT



◆ KEY ART 1

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Plague Knight was originally an explosives-themed boss called Dyna Knight (think dynamite), but when we brought the character into a medieval setting and established the plague doctor motif, we decided Plague Knight was a lot easier to say than Dyna Knight.

Sometimes, the bomb is mightier than the sword. Deep in the recesses of his alchemical lab, Plague Knight perfects concoctions both poisonous and explosive. Toxin, disease, and death are his playgrounds. Even his comrades give Plague Knight a wide berth, because he spreads more than just the common cold. With an array of mysterious and magical bottles at his side, Plague Knight could be considered the black sheep of The Order of No Quarter.

- Pros: Maniacal scientific mind, fearlessness
- Cons: Physically weak, short stature, shy at parties

## ■ GAME SPRITES



◆ KEY ART 2



◆ KEY ART 3



◆ KEY ART 4

## DEV. COMMENTARY

Everyone on the team thought the fuse in Plague Knight's bomb looked like a straw, so we made him drink from it in a few of his animations!





## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



### DEV. COMMENTARY

Plague Knight did not get his Cardcaptor Sakura cane until we made his sprite! If you look at the early concepts, he only had a bomb in his hand to start.



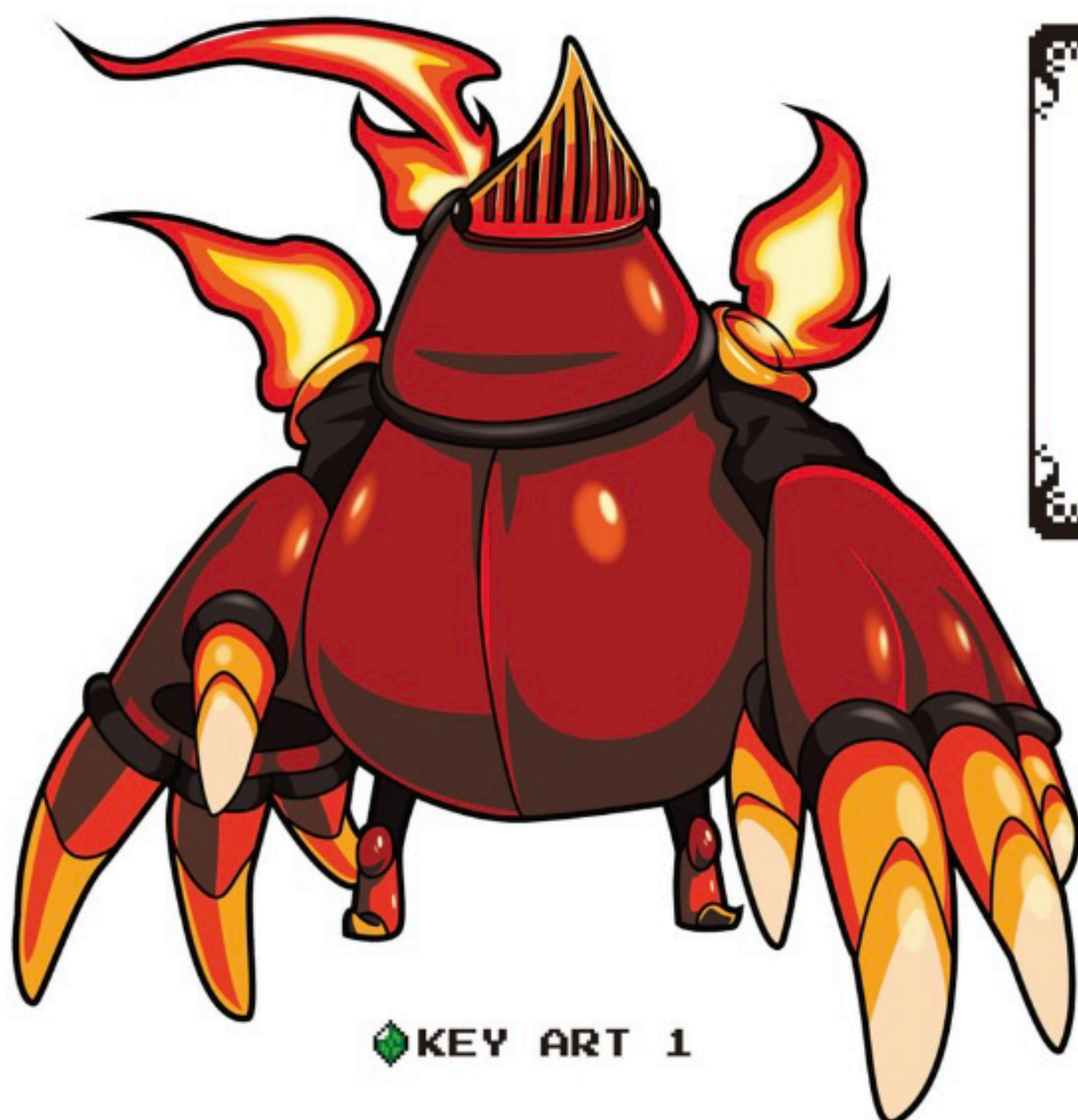
### 🟡 EARLY CONCEPT







# MOLE KNIGHT



◆ KEY ART 1

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

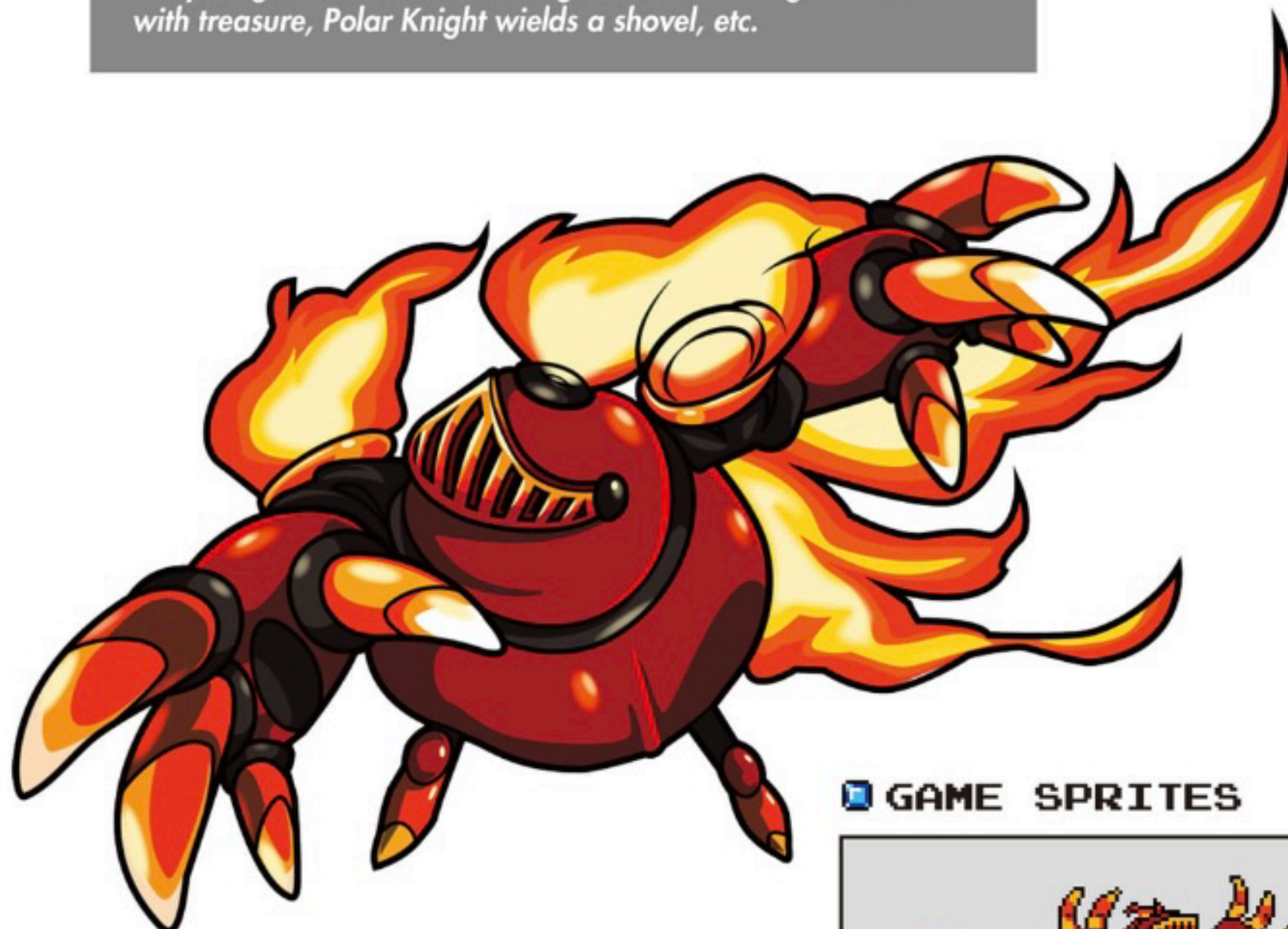
Mole Knight started as a big, round mechanical guy with large digging claws and became more mole-ish as time went on. Like Shovel Knight, he likes to dig. In fact, most of the Order share a competing trait with Shovel Knight: Treasure Knight is obsessed with treasure, Polar Knight wields a shovel, etc.

The shovel may rule the confines of man-made gardens, but in the wild, the titan of tunneling is the mole! Mole Knight embraces this truth wholeheartedly. With his modified drop-forged armored claws, he mockingly tears through the earth with brute strength! Mole Knight calls the subterranean Lost City his home... an ancient abandoned metropolis. Shovel Knight must pass through the Lost City, but chances are slim he won't be challenged to see who is truly the master of digging.

- Pros: Great eyesight, shrewd, high endurance
- Cons: Obsessive personality, gets sweaty in armor



◆ KEY ART 2



◆ KEY ART 3

## ◆ GAME SPRITES





## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES

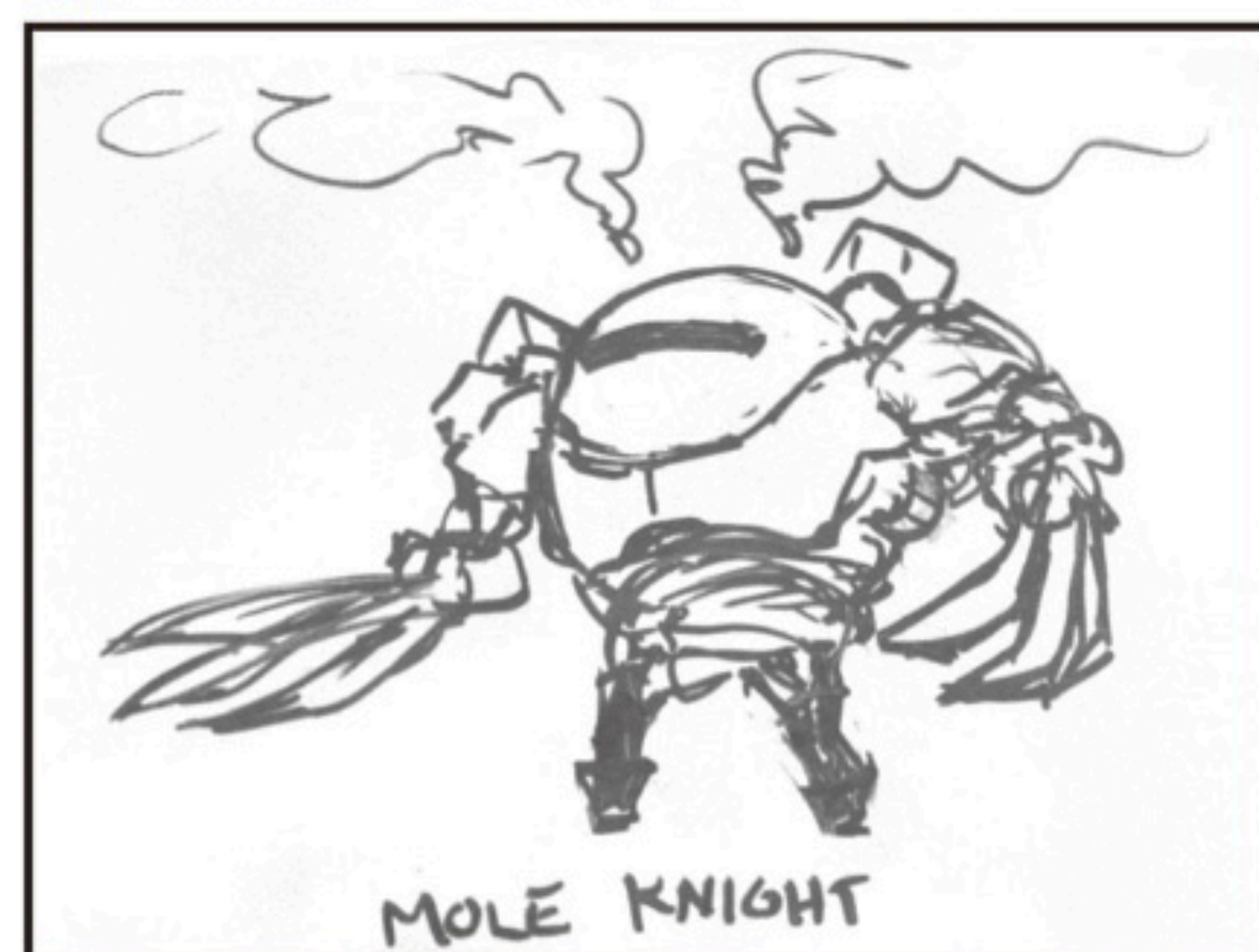


### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*This concept art was misinterpreted when creating Mole Knight's sprite, which led to the now-standard fiery plume coming from Mole Knight's helmet.*



### ● EARLY CONCEPT







# TINKER KNIGHT

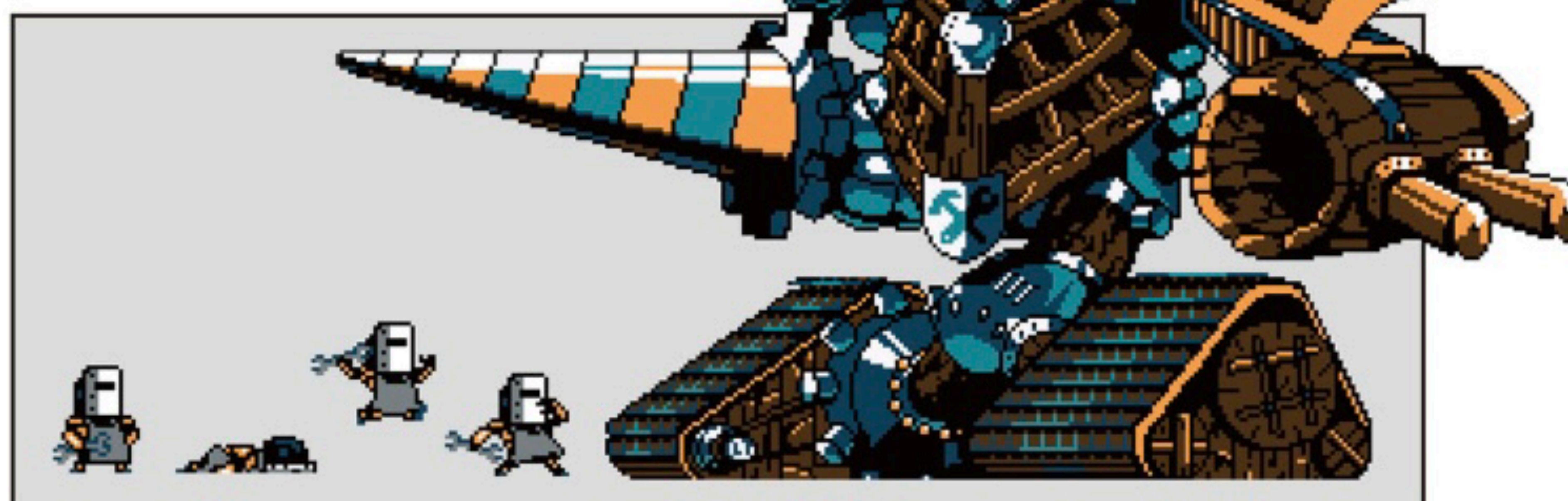


◆ KEY ART 1

Some knights love rushing into the glory of battle, ready to crush the skulls of their enemies! Tinker Knight is not one of those knights. He does his fighting before the battle begins, laboring on diabolical devices that do his work for him. The wrench is the tool of his trade, doubling as an engineering device and a melee weapon. Some are quick to dismiss Tinker Knight's lethality... usually just before falling victim to one of his mechanical monstrosities!

- Pros: Gregarious demeanor, hard worker
- Cons: Rough hands, works long hours, always out to prove himself

■ GAME SPRITES



◆ KEY ART 2

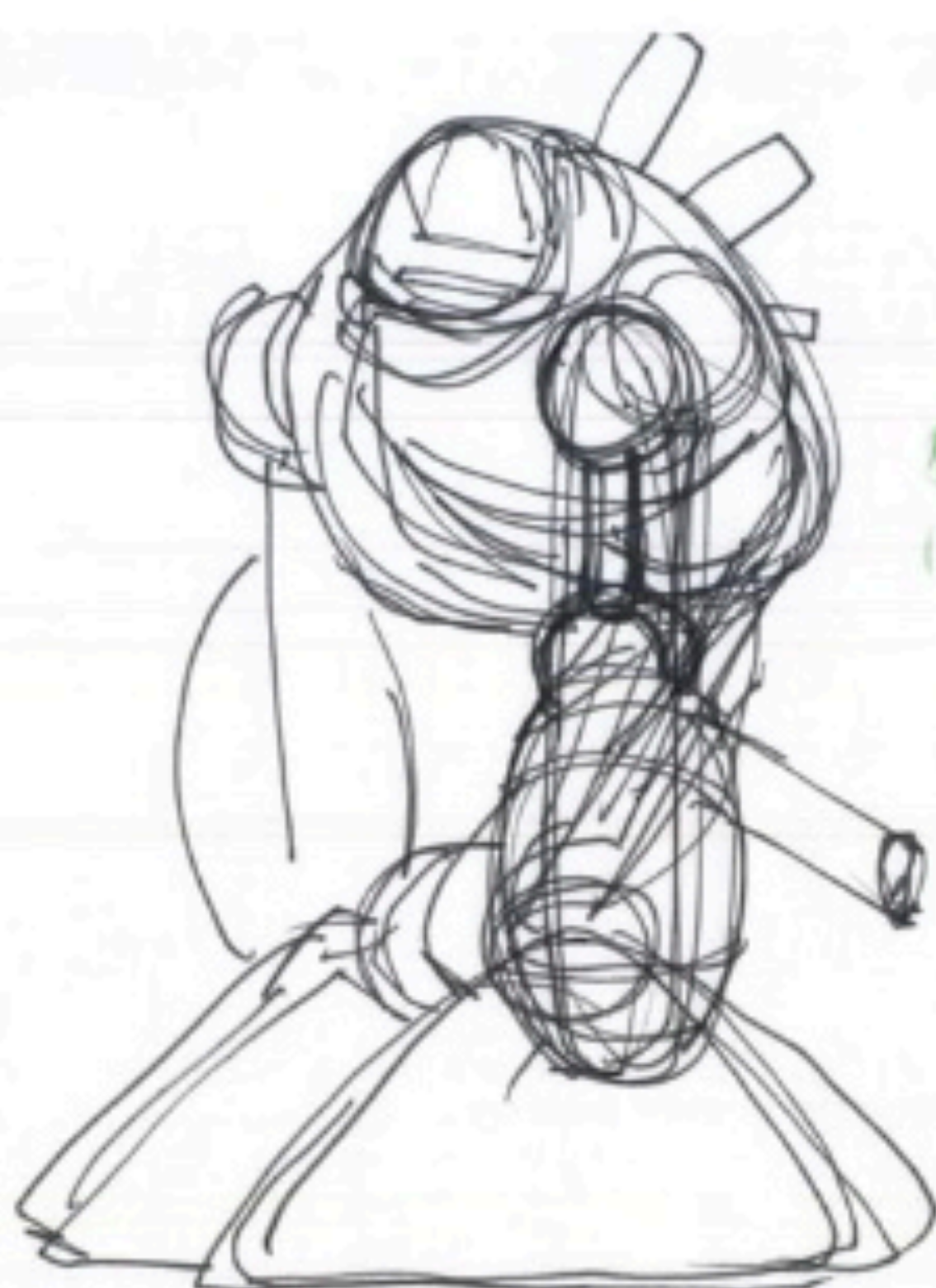
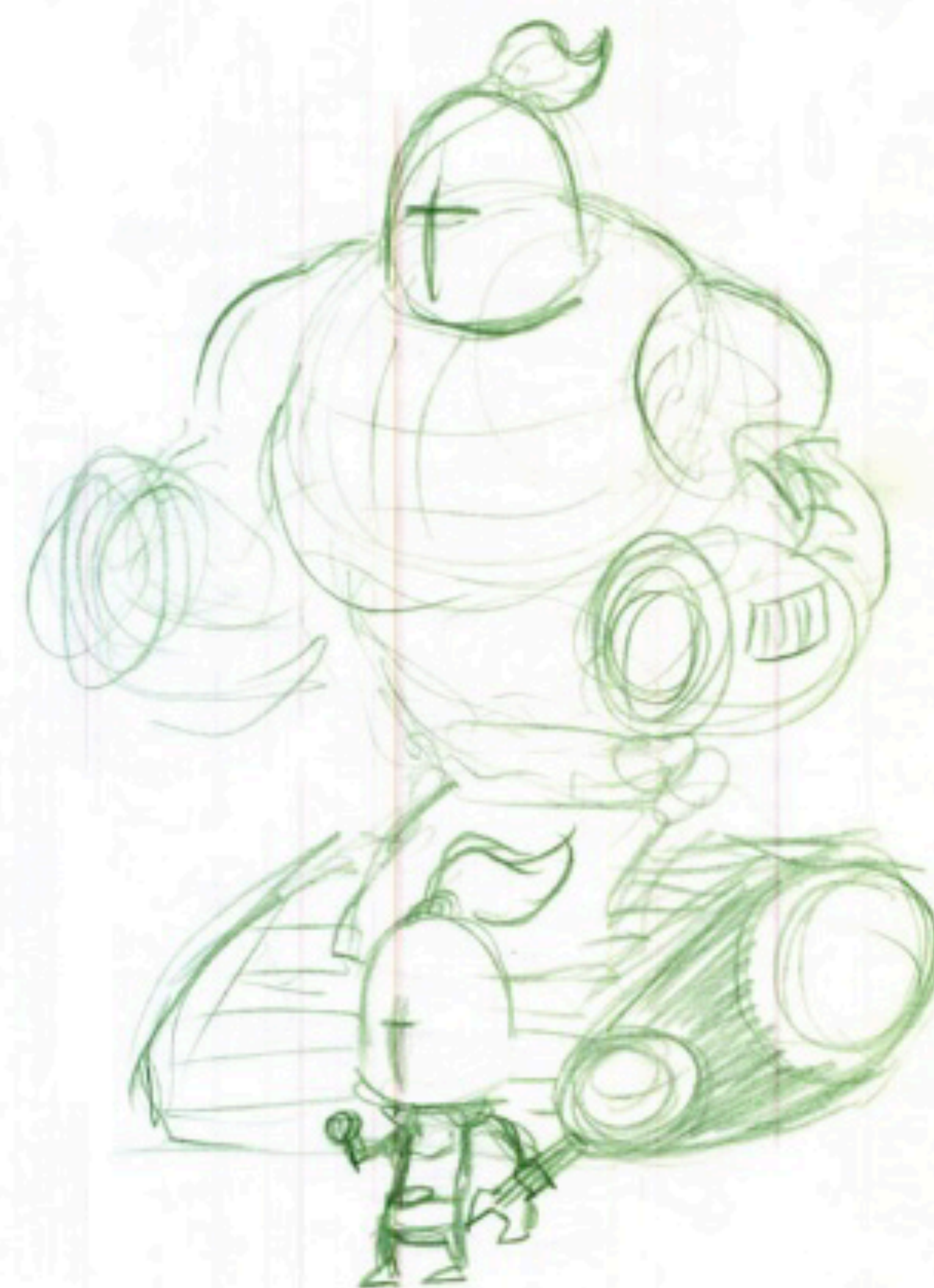
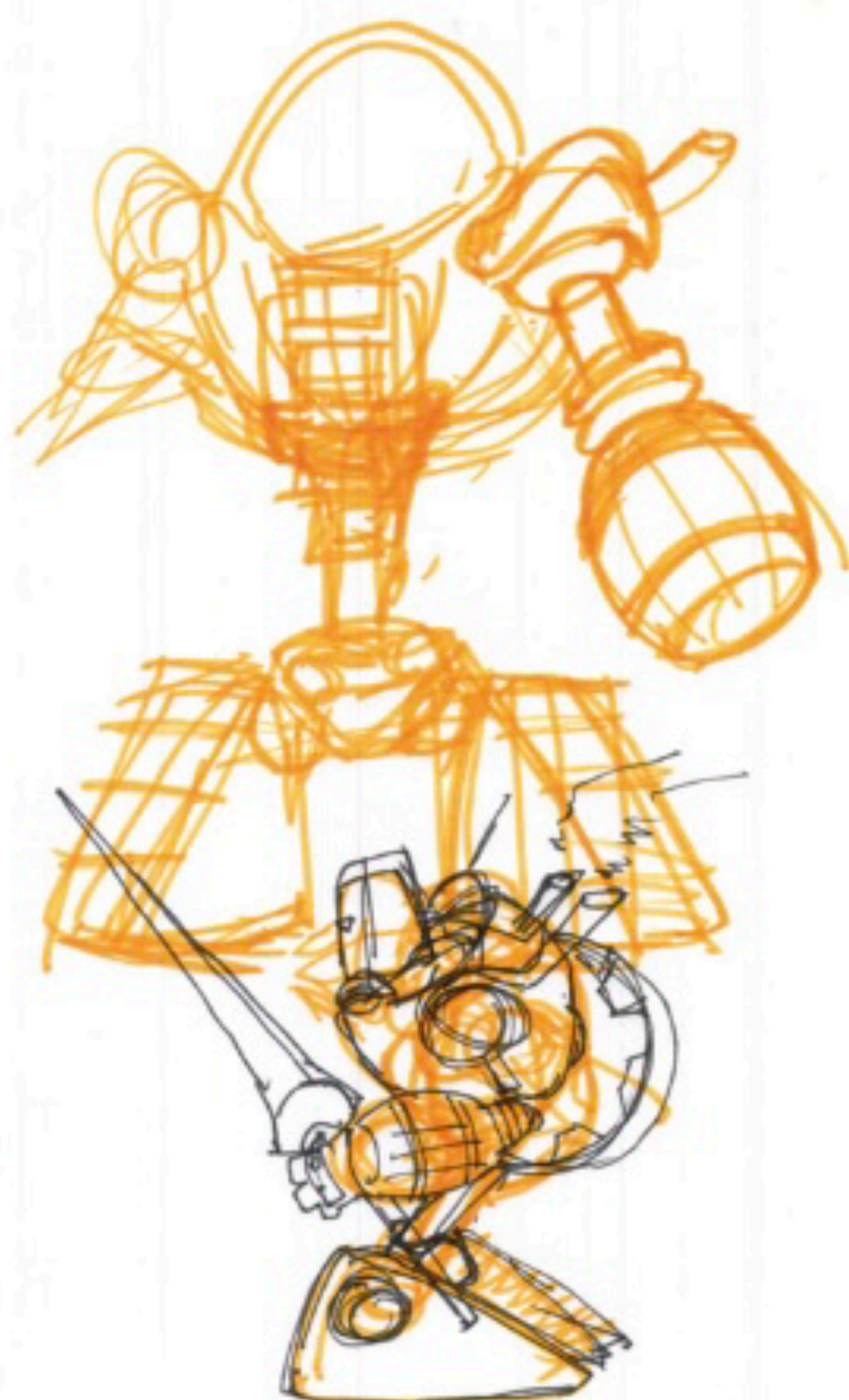
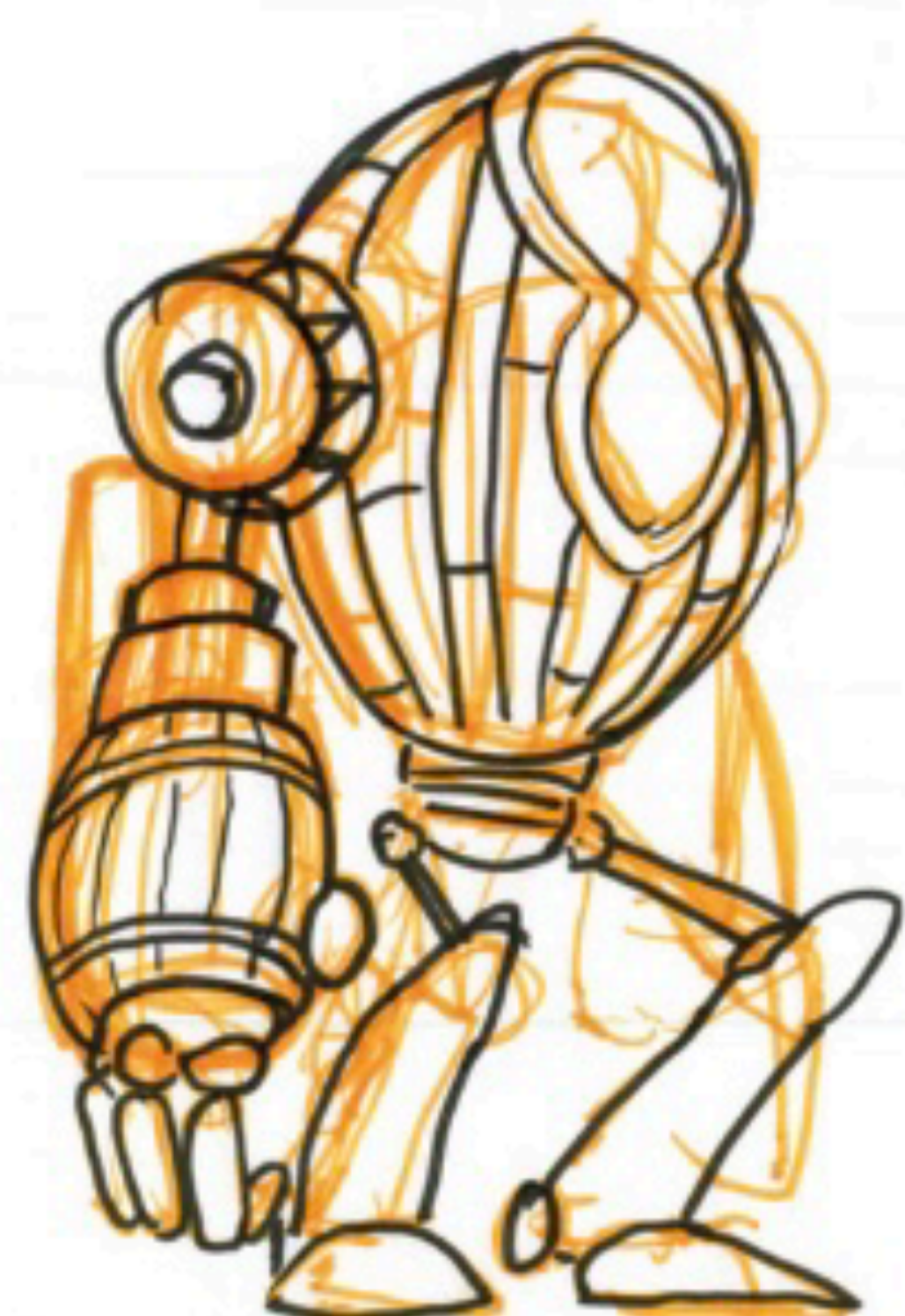


◆ KEY ART 3



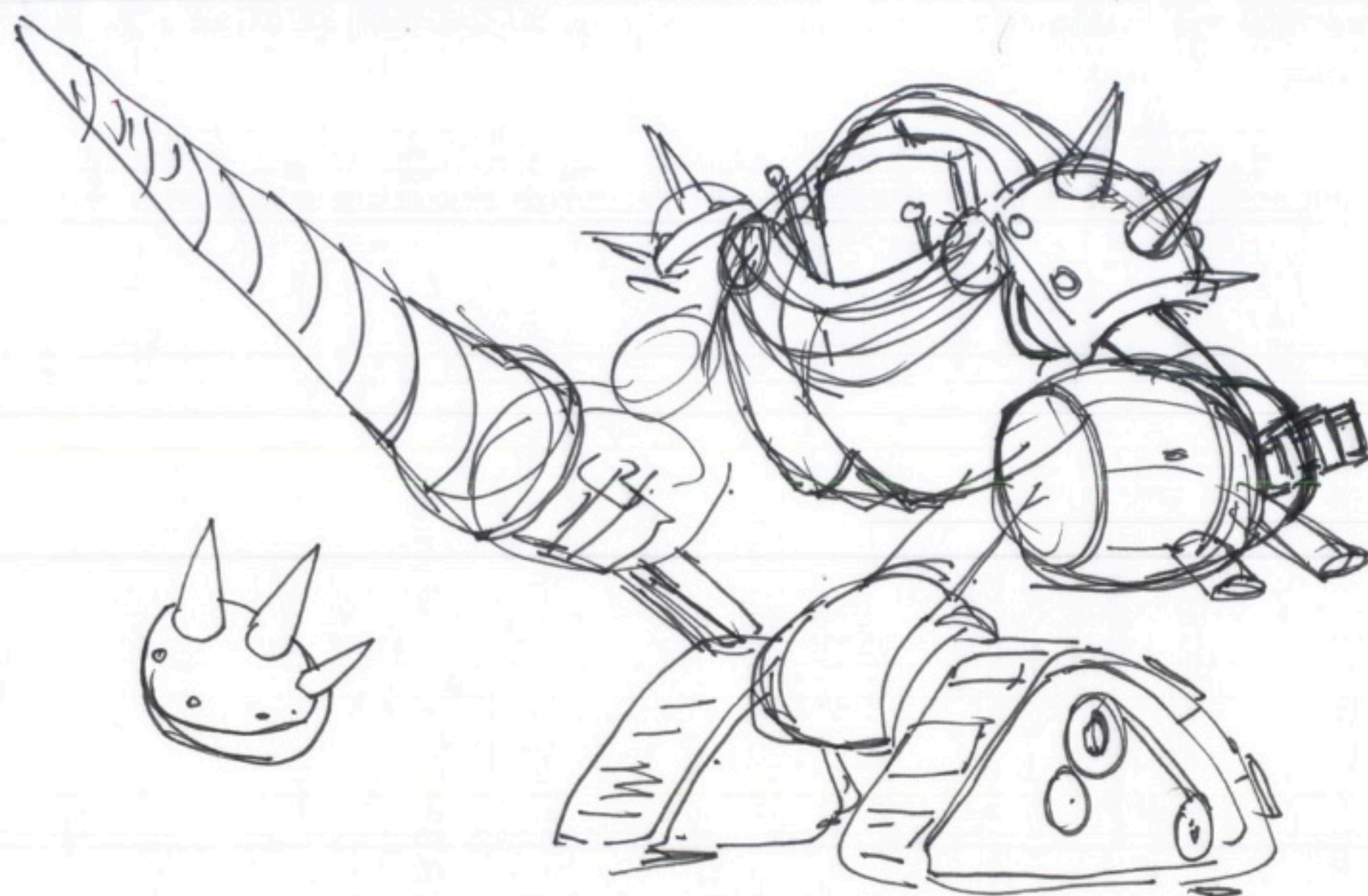
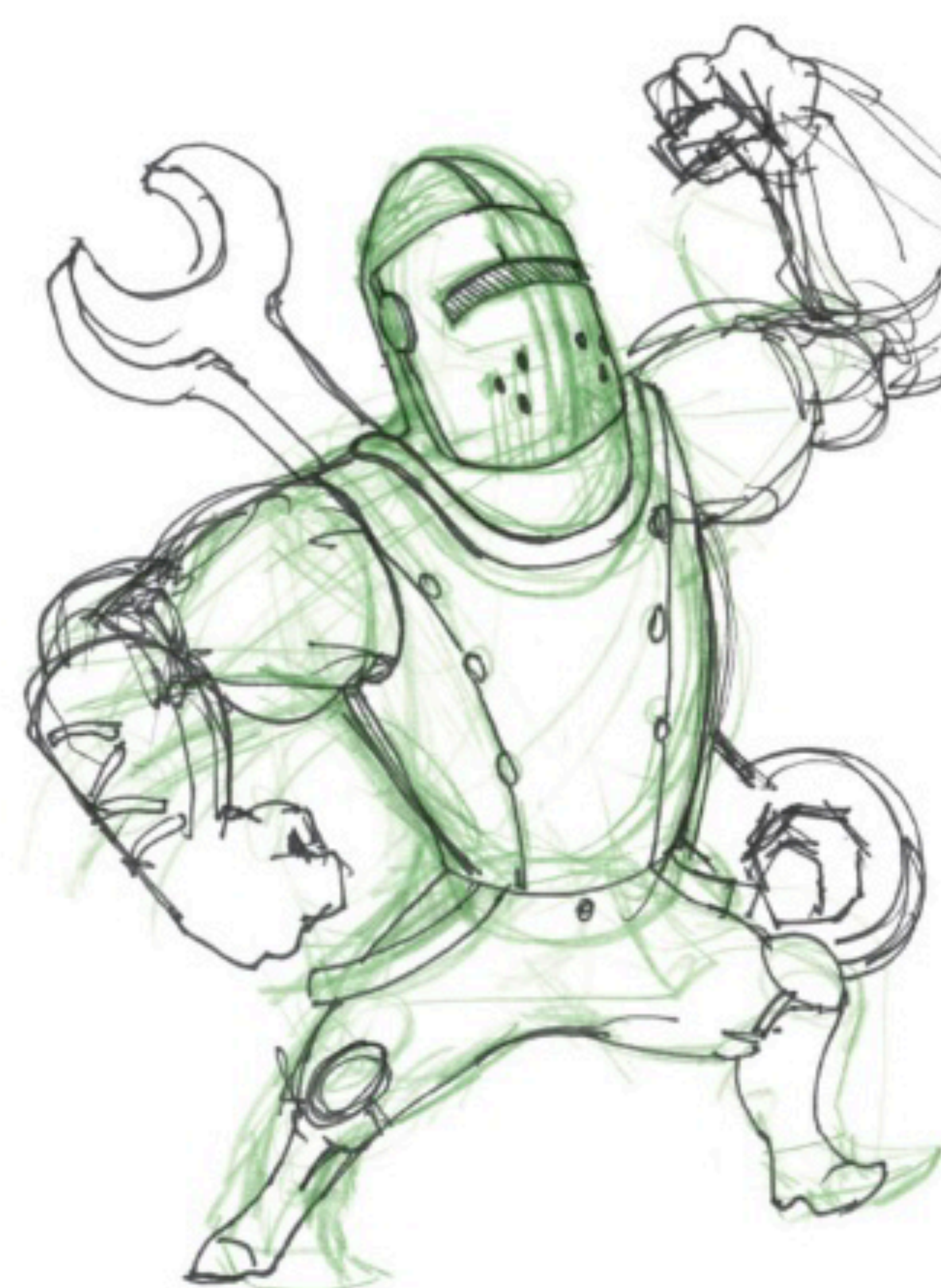
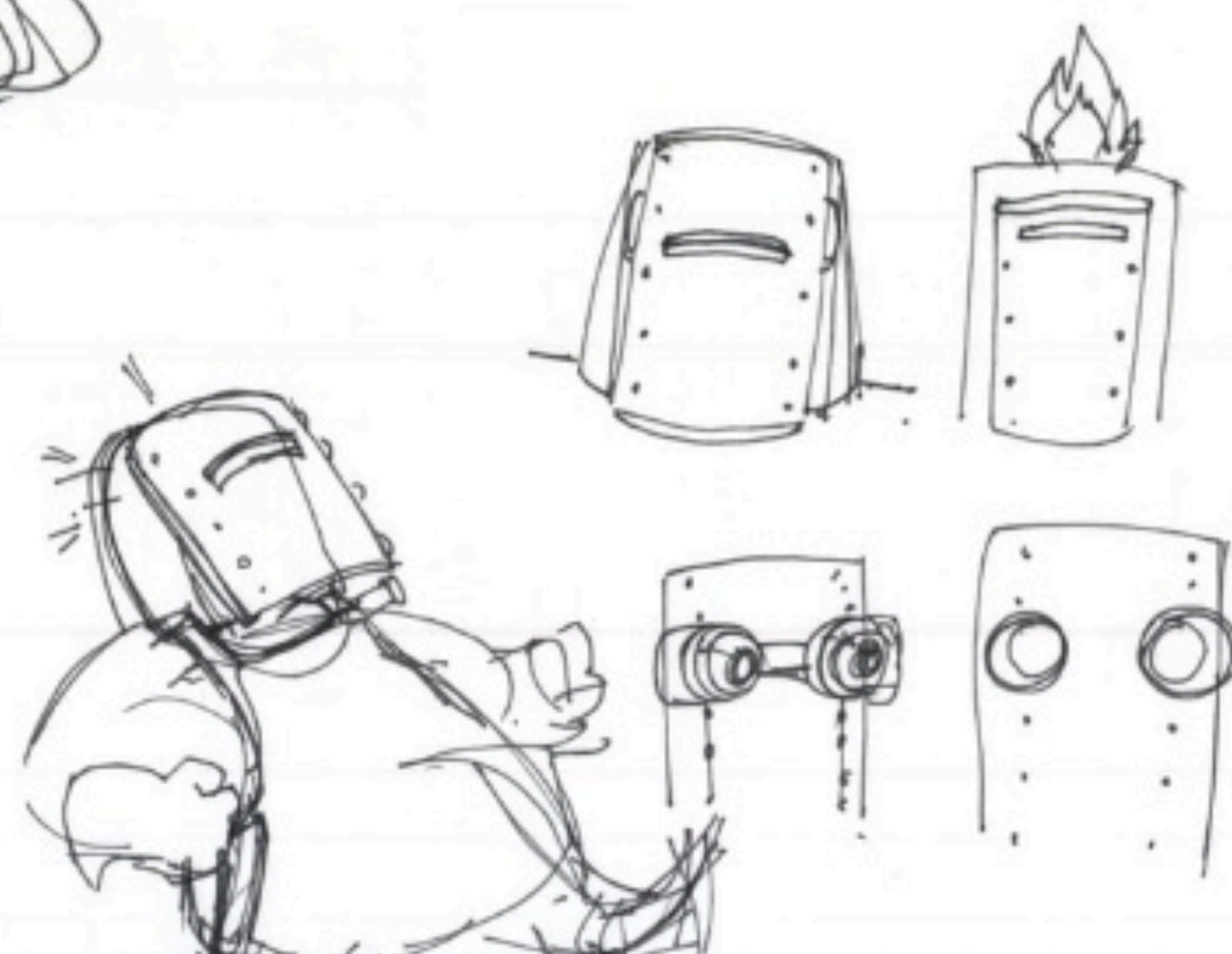


## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES

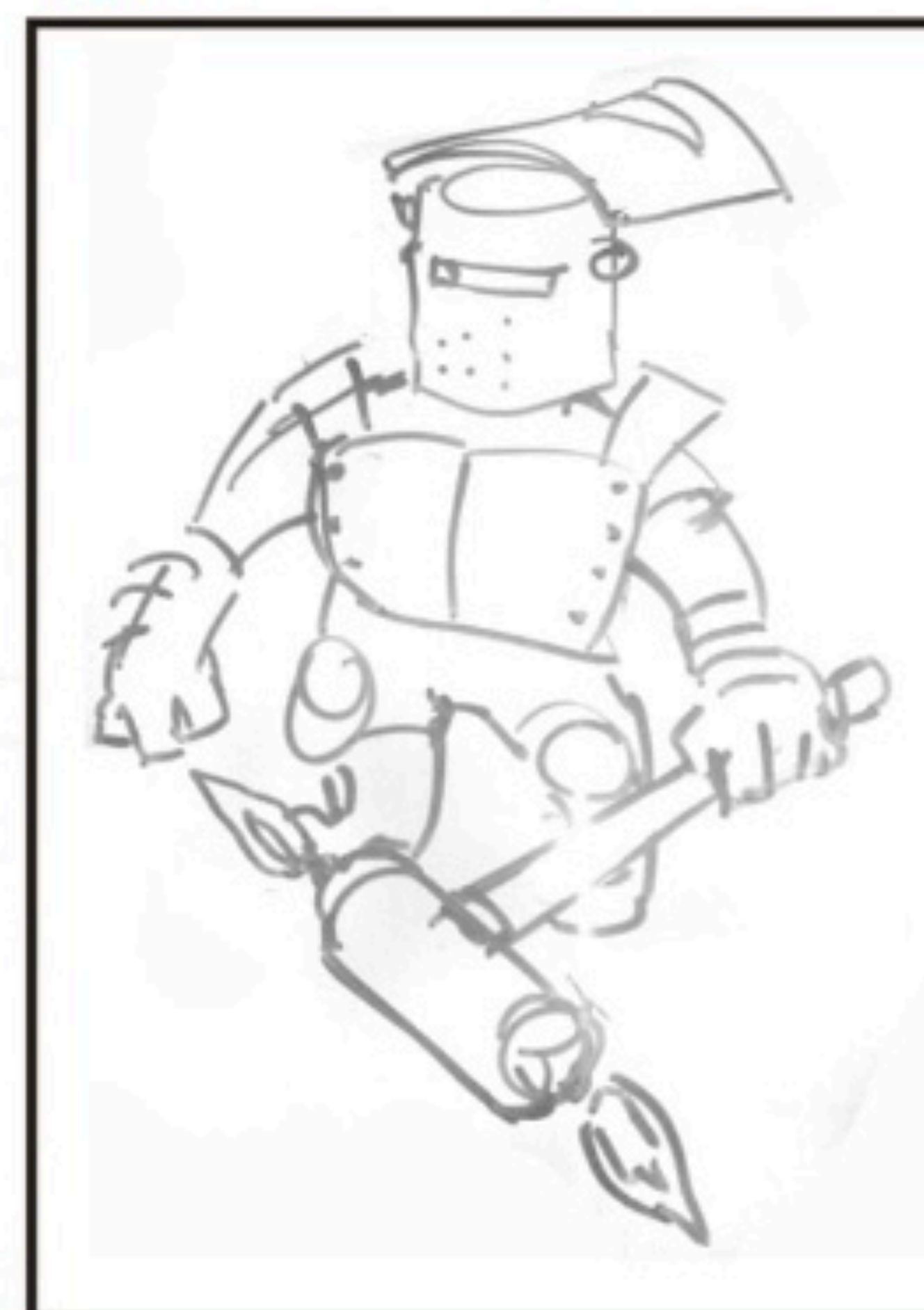


### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Originally, Tinker Knight was a big, buff welder, but as his robot form got larger and larger, Tinker Knight himself became smaller and smaller.



### ● EARLY CONCEPT







# POLAR KNIGHT



◆ KEY ART 1



◆ KEY ART 2



◆ KEY ART 3

Titanic and terrible, Polar Knight guards the stranded ship in the frozen south. A silent giant wielding a two-handed snow shovel, he is the largest and most brutish of The Order of No Quarter. Sometime in the past, Shovel Knight and Polar Knight have crossed shovels before...

- Pros: Wields snow shovel, doesn't feel cold but is quite considerate!
- Cons: Annoying laugh (it's like water torture!)

## DEV. COMMENTARY

Designed as a foil to the diminutive Shovel Knight, Polar Knight looms large and wields a huge Shovel Blade modeled after a snow shovel.

## GAME SPRITES





## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES

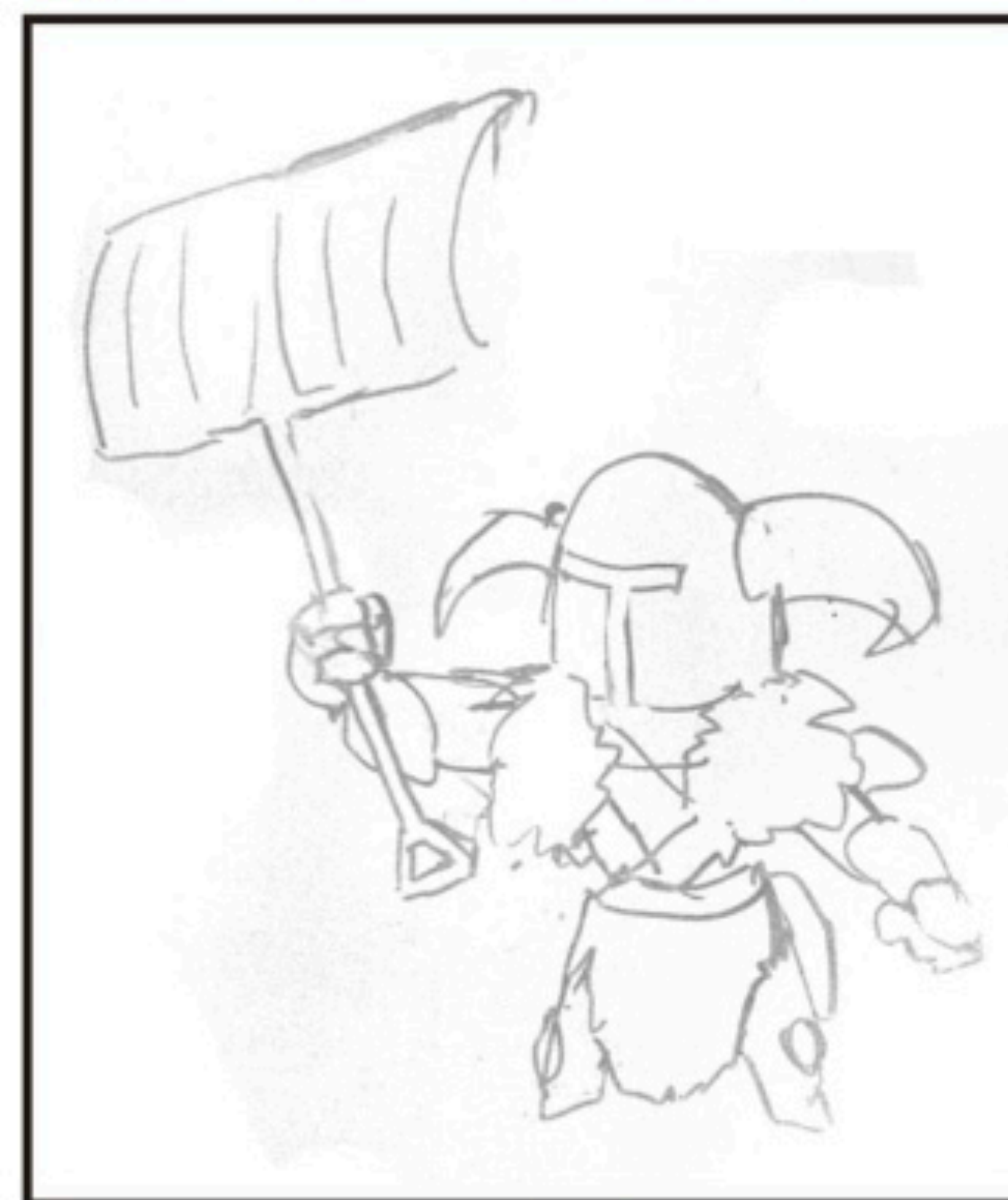


### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

The mole on Polar Knight's face came from a misinterpretation of the sprite. Originally conceived of as Polar Knight's nasolabial fold, the team thought that Woz was putting an Easter egg of himself into the game. In some descriptions, you'll notice that Polar Knight's laugh is described as "water torture," a nod to the fact that Woz's laugh was once described this way.



### ● EARLY CONCEPT







# PROPELLER KNIGHT



◆ KEY ART 1

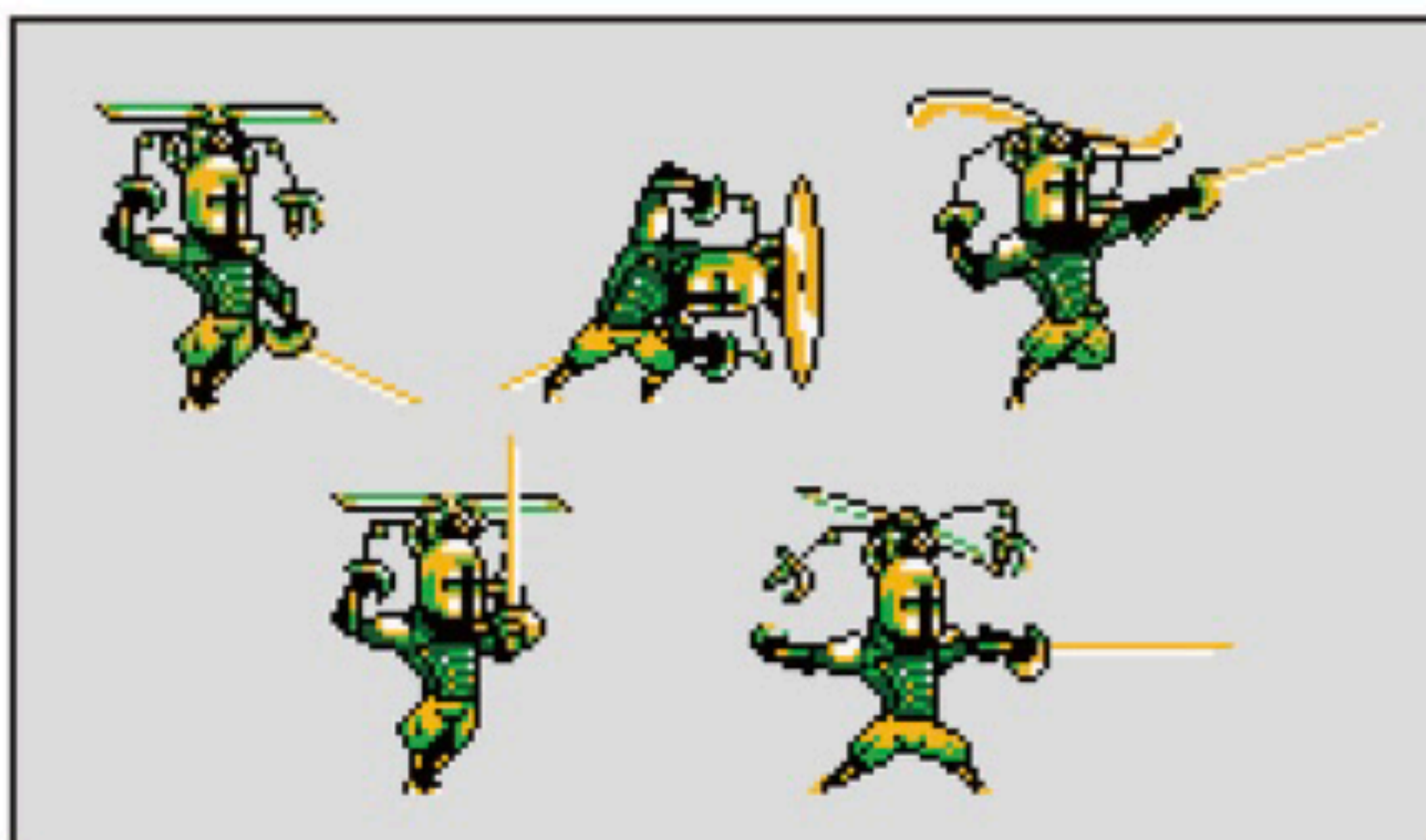
This acrodynamic ace commands the Enchantress' flying machine with the cocksure attitude of a sky pirate! With his Heli-Helmet, he can zoom short distances with ease. Shovel Knight encounters Propeller Knight on top of the Flying Machine as it zooms through the sky; earth fights against air in a true battle of elements!

- Pros: Talented fencer, mechanical Heli-Helmet, debonair!
- Cons: Arrogance, lightweight, outrageous accent!



◆ KEY ART 2

## ■ GAME SPRITES



## DEV. COMMENTARY

At one point, we thought Propeller Knight would draw his weapon from the propeller blades on his head.





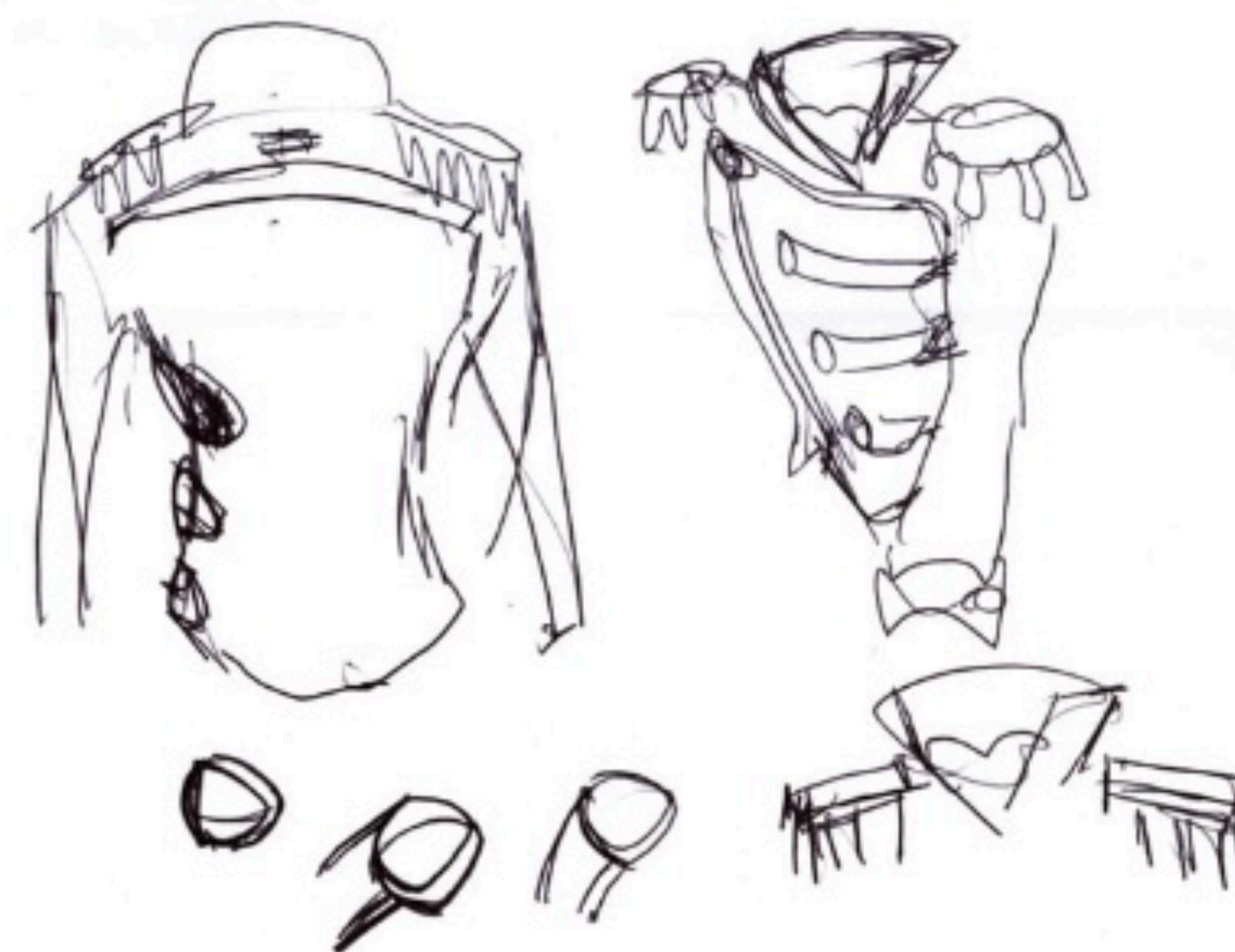


◆ KEY ART 3

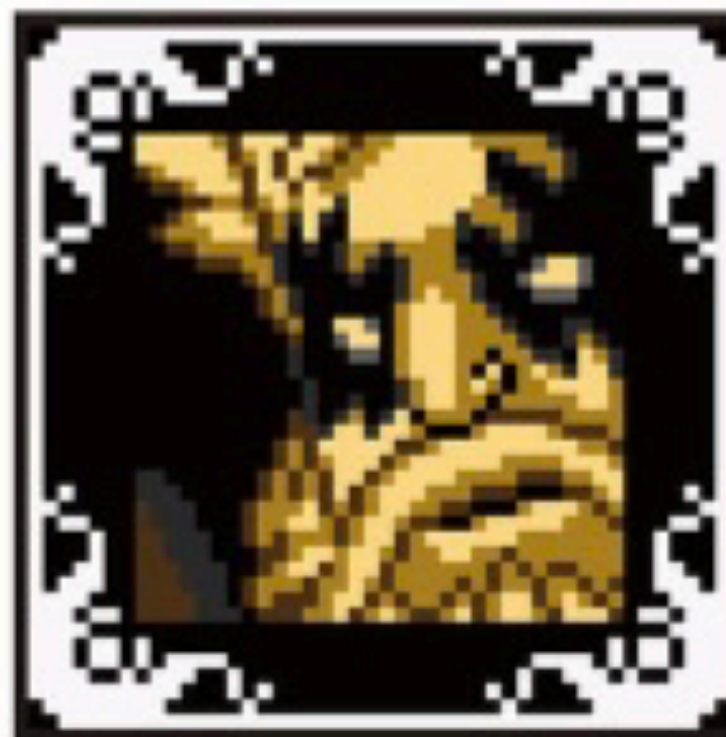
● EARLY CONCEPT



◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



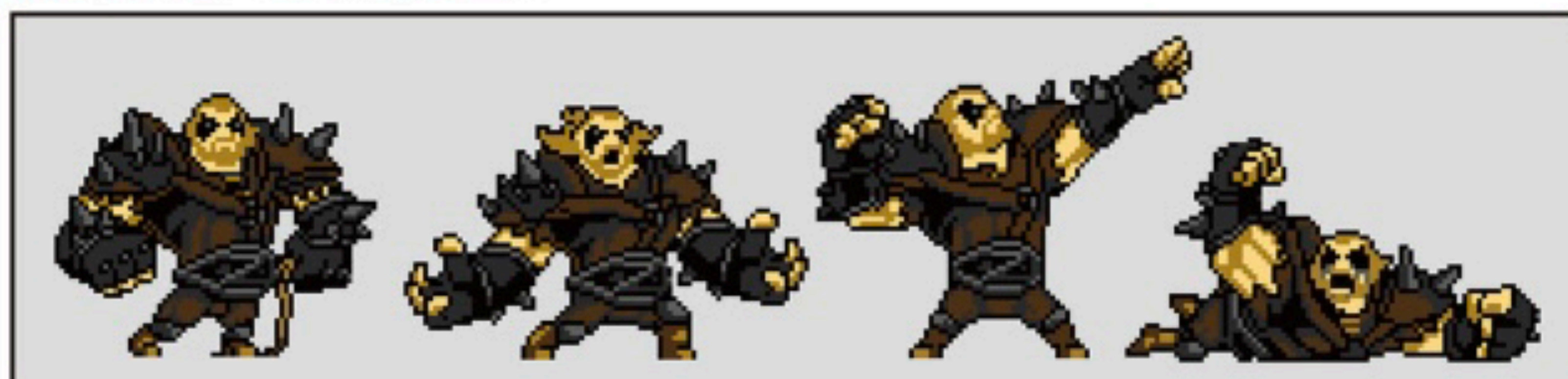




# THE BAZ

*The Baz was directed by Matt and Woolie from Two Best Friends Play.*

## GAME SPRITES



Rejected by The Order of No Quarter, he now roams the land, taking out his anger on passersby.

## KEY ART



## DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



### DEV. COMMENTARY

*The Baz was described to us as "The worst loser ever, who tries to be the coolest!"*







# REIZE SEATLAN

Reize Seatlan was directed by Danny D. Henderson Jr., AKA "Seizui."



◆ KEY ART

## ■ GAME SPRITES



A bit naive but always well-intentioned, Reize is eager to thwart evildoers with his Twin Crystal Boomerangs!

## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCH



## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Reize had pre-existing character traits and was a fully formed idea when he came to us. It was a fun challenge adding this plucky anime kid into Shovel Knight's world.





# MR. HAT

Mr. Hat was directed by Alexander "Hatman" Hatzikides.



KEY ART

## GAME SPRITES



Mr. Hat is obsessed with hats, but for good reason! For although he wears a helmet, each hat he places atop his head gives him the powers of that hat's owner!



## DEV. COMMENTARY

Mr. Hat's initial design called for many different hats. For example, he had a boater hat where he would split into four versions of himself like a barbershop quartet, and a Michael Jackson hat that would enable him to do the King of Pop's dance moves. But we had to pare this down to two themes that stood in strong contrast to one another.

## DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES

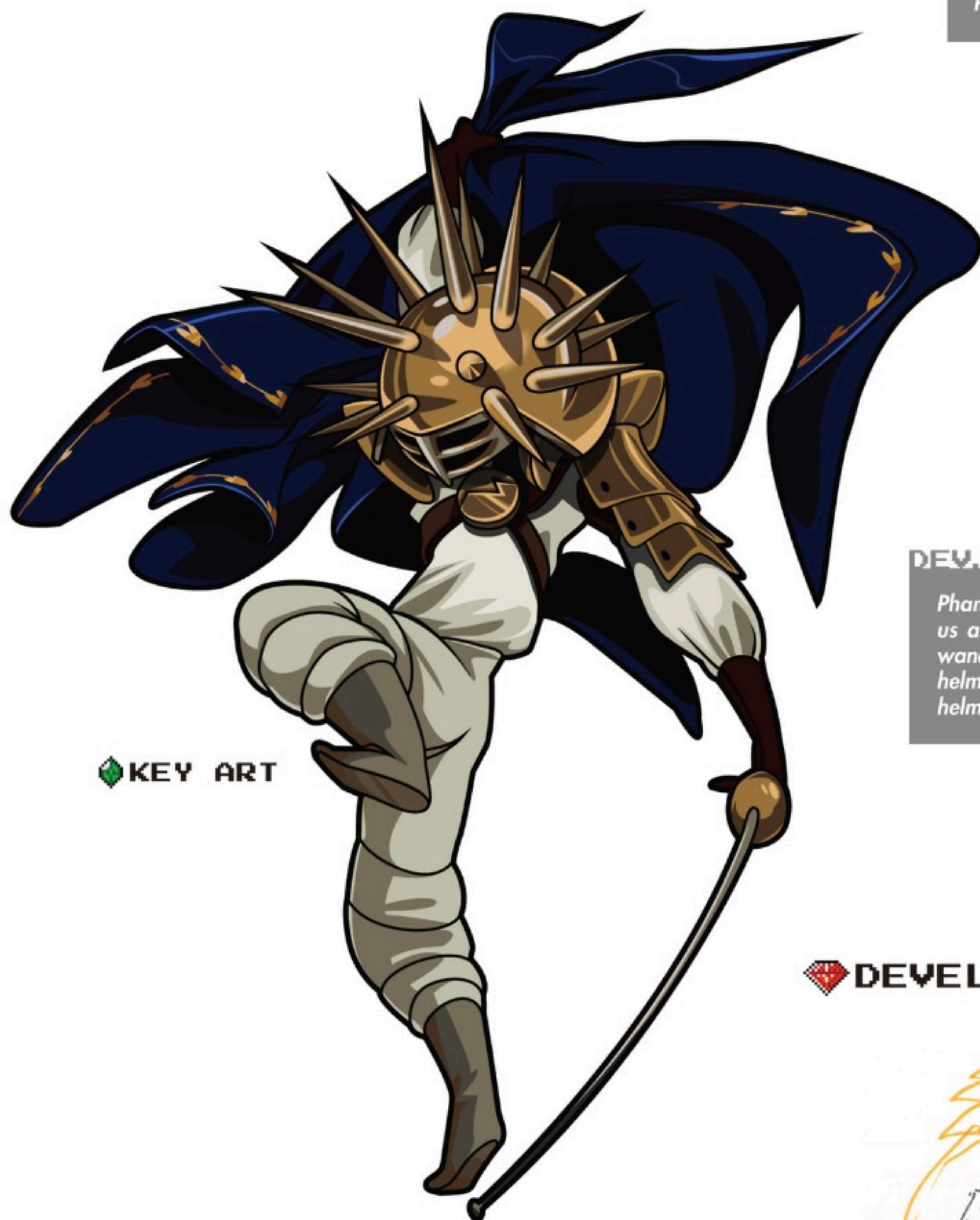






# PHANTOM STRIKER

*Phantom Striker was directed by Steven Ness.*



◆ KEY ART

## DEV. COMMENTARY

*Phantom Striker was described to us as a storm-themed warrior who wanders the land, testing heroes. His helmet is a mix between a gladiator helmet and a plasma globe!*

## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCH



## ■ GAME SPRITES



A lone warrior, Phantom Striker appears to those whom he deems worthy of challenging him.





KEY ART

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

The Bard's in-game character was a play on our composer, Jake Kaufman. We had him write all of the Bard's dialogue and song descriptions so the Bard could take on his personality.

## THE BARD

The wandering Bard has lost his collection of Song Scrolls! If you find them, he will reward you.



GAME SPRITES

## DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



## CHESTER

This guy somehow seems to have all the best Magical Relics. He gives you a discount if you can find him out in the field.



GAME SPRITES

## DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



KEY ART

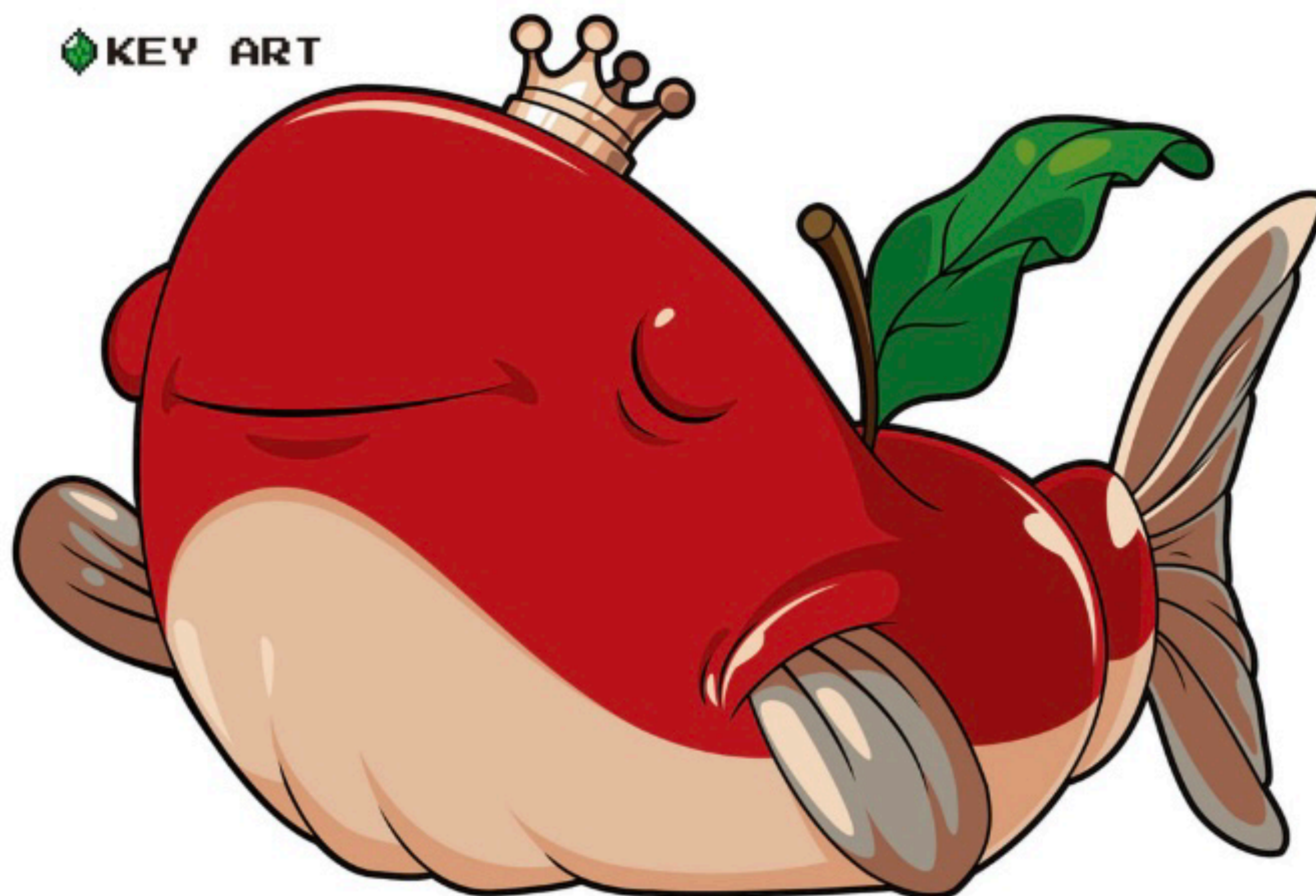
## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We wanted the player to obtain weapons by purchasing them mid-stage, but it would have been strange to have a character just standing around in a dangerous place. Then someone proposed having a person spring out from a chest! The name Chester was supposed to be temporary, but we just couldn't come up with a better one!



# THE TROUPPLE KING

## KEY ART

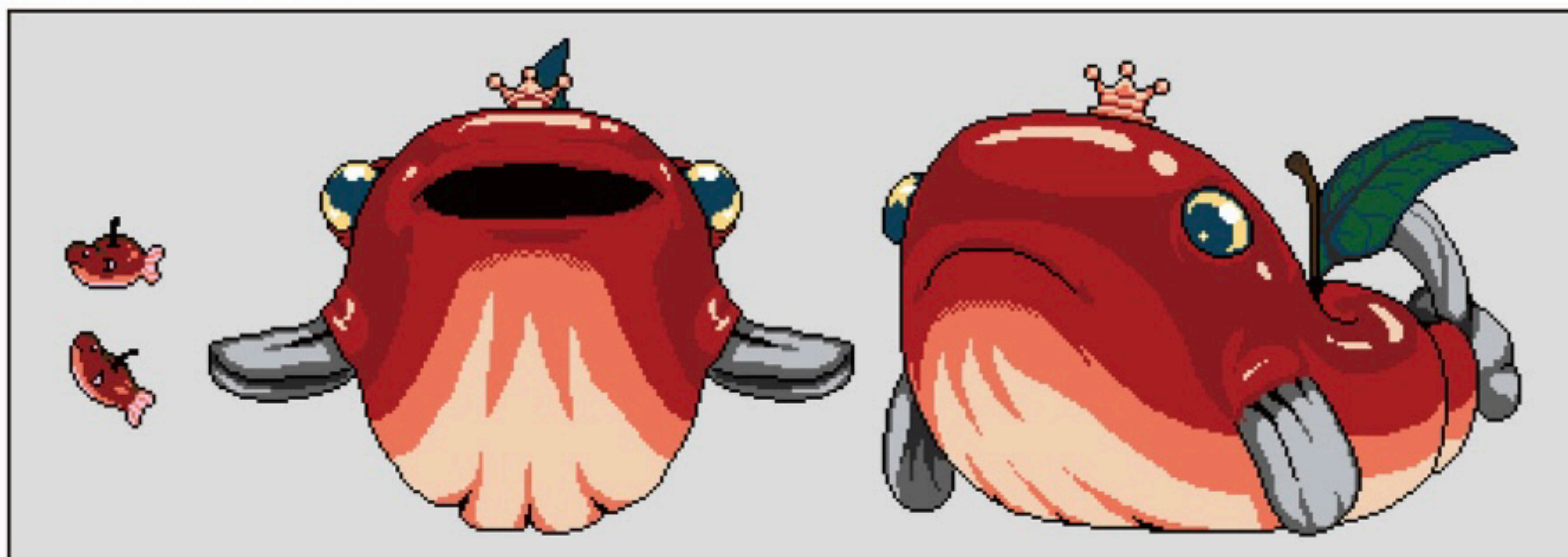


All hail the King of Fish and Fruit!  
If you have a Troupple Chalice, the  
Troupple King will grant you one  
of three magical ichors... or maybe  
even a dance!



TROUPPLE

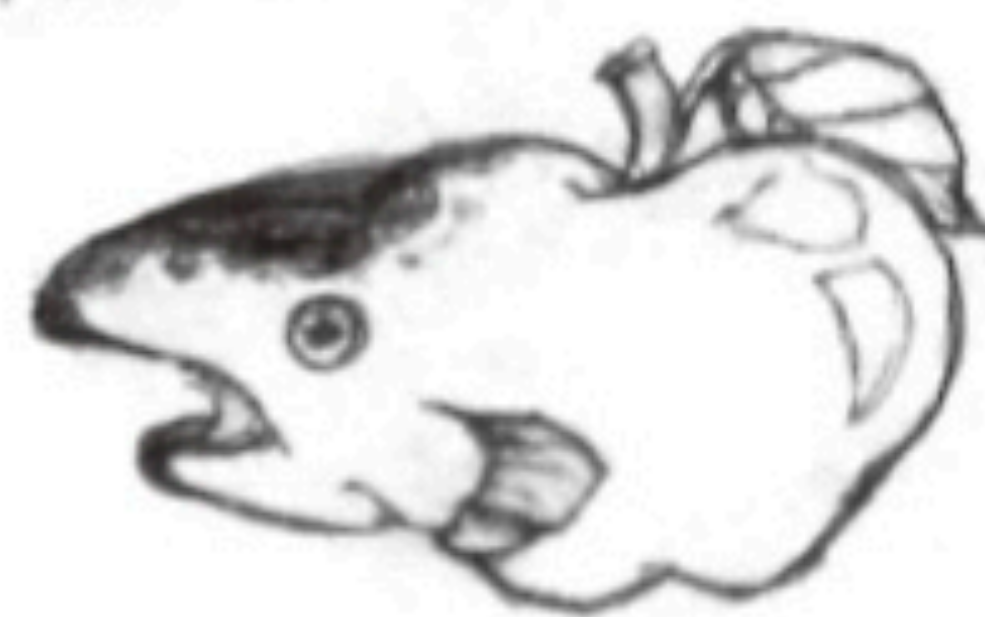
## GAME SPRITES



## DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



TROUPPLES



## DEV. COMMENTARY

The idea of Troupples came from a box of Washington State trout apples that was at one of our homes. The first Troupple was sketched out on a Post-It note that we stuck to the fridge.



# VILLAGERS



## THE MAGICIST

Quaff her magical potions to increase your maximum magic by 10! "Quaff" means to drink heartily. Knights quaff their potions!



## TROUPPLE ACOLYTE

This weird guy keeps raving about the Troupple King. It seems like if Shovel Knight is going to get far, he'll need to buy a Troupple Chalice...



## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Few village characters were created with a specific purpose in mind. For example, the Goatician was initially just window dressing. Much later, we added Meal Tickets to help encourage the player to upgrade their health, and the Goatician was turned into a salesman!



## THE GOATICIAN

The Goatician offers to sell you Meal Tickets in the village... or at least he would if he stopped eating them.







## THE GASTRONOMER

Eat his meals to upgrade your health by one bubble!



## THE SHOVELSMITH

The Shovelsmith can forge the Shovel Blade to give it fantastic new properties.



Blacksmith Greyson

## THE ARMORER

The Armorer can outfit Shovel Knight with new armors, giving him new powers and abilities.



## VILLAGERS (CONTINUED)

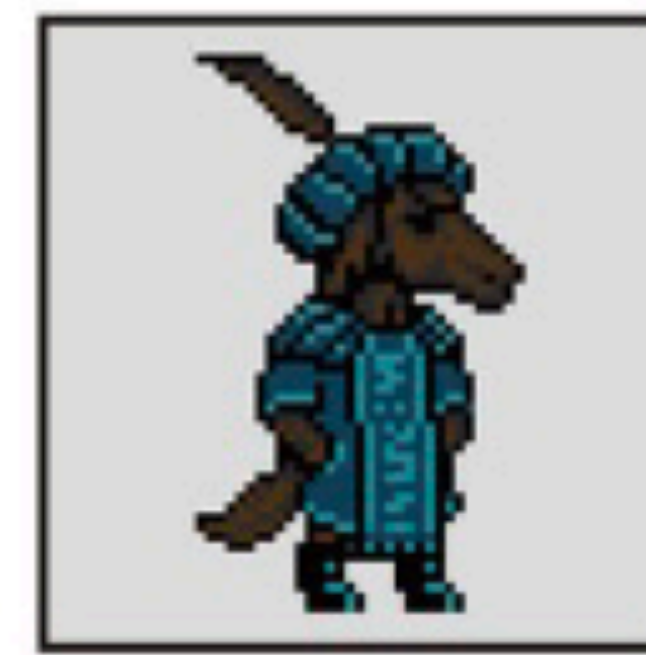


### GRANDMA SWAMP

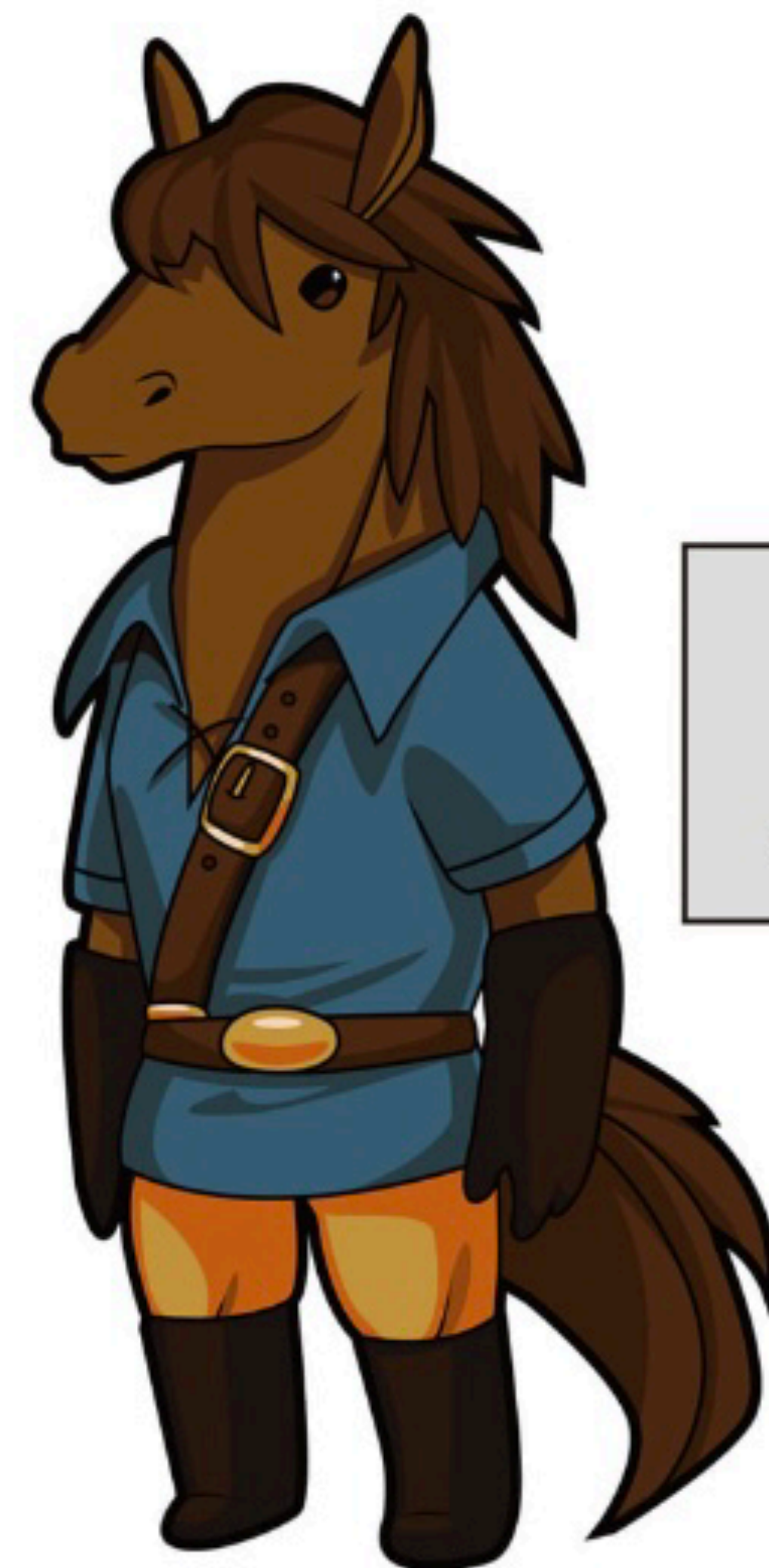
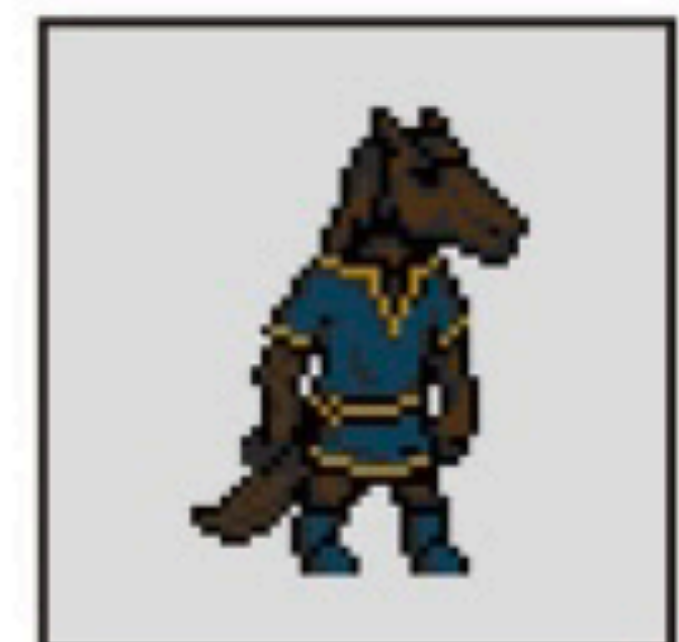
If you'd like to check on your adventure's progress, just ask Grandma Swamp - but don't call her a witch!



### WATER CARRIER



### HORSE SCHOLAR



### HORSE PERSON

#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

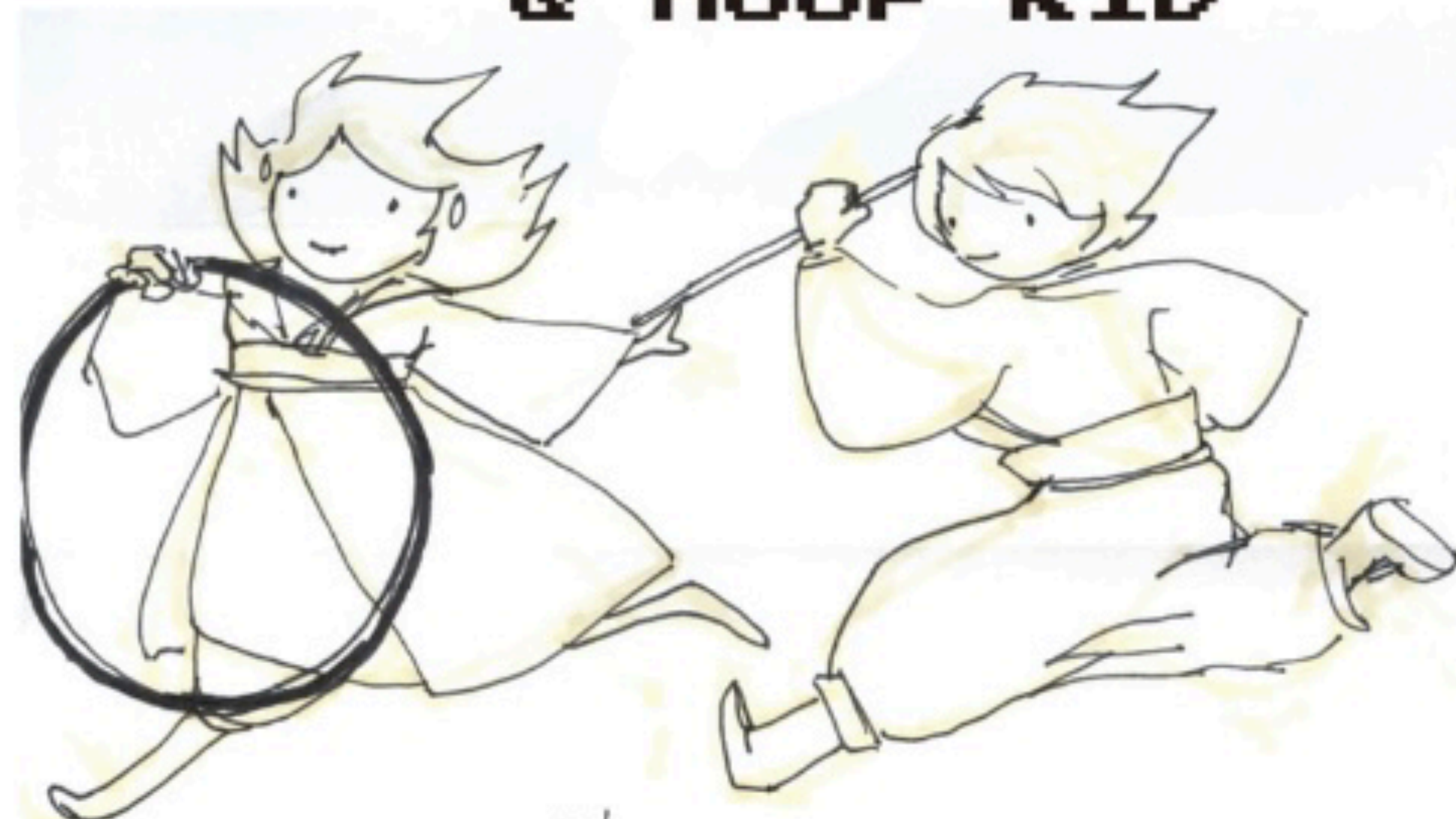
The "Horse People" were the first NPCs we made! These weirdos laid the foundation for the bizarre and goofy types of characters you might encounter in the village. Creativity took over from there as we sketched more and more characters!







**PLAY KID  
& HOOP KID**

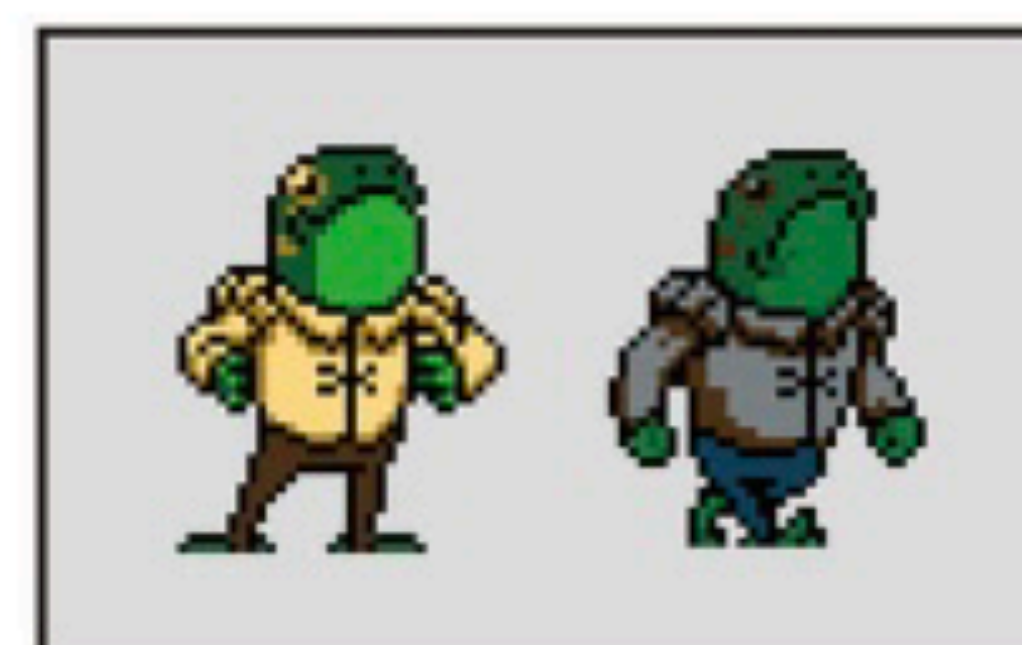


Hoop Stick Children

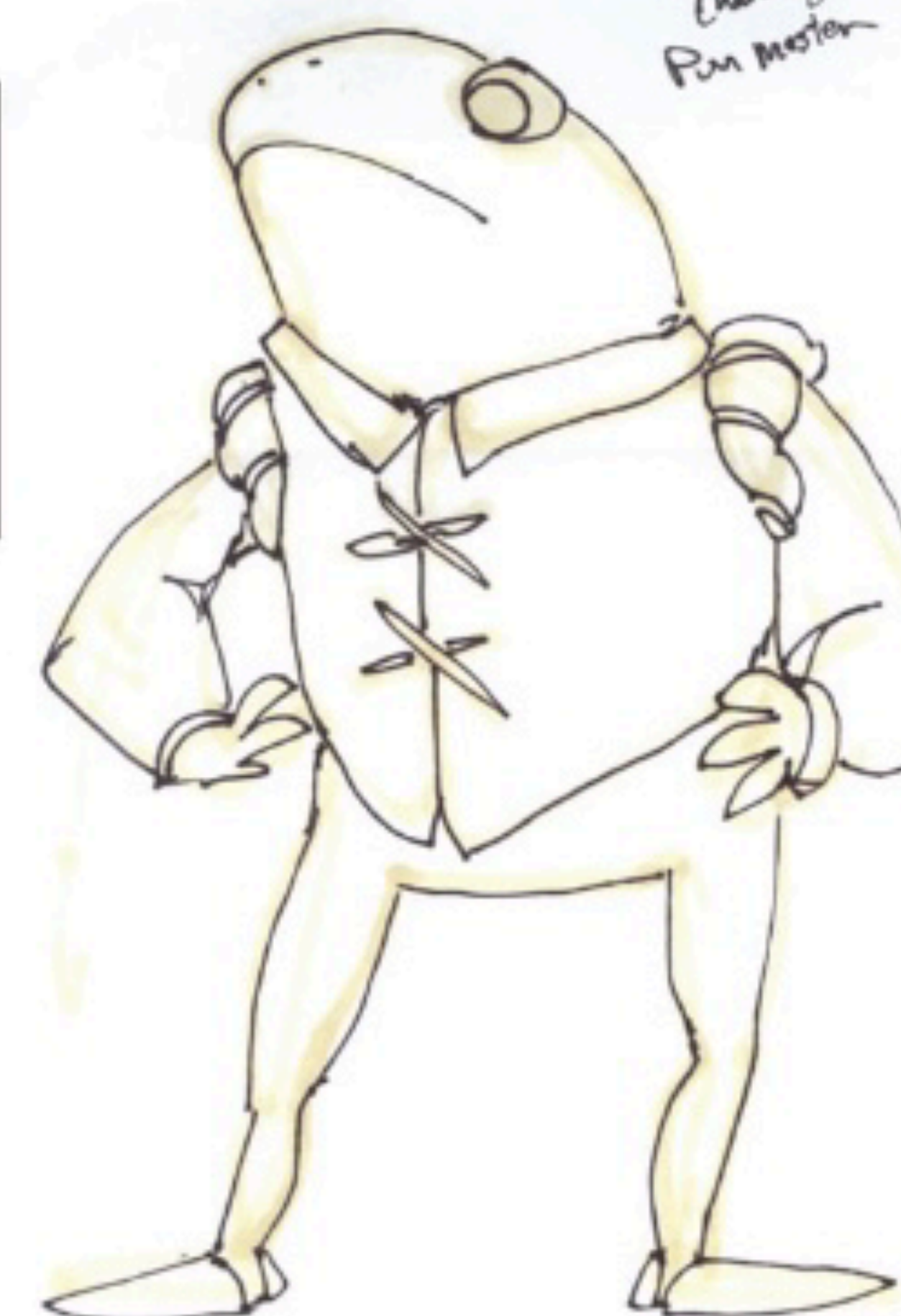
hopscotch or bug catching



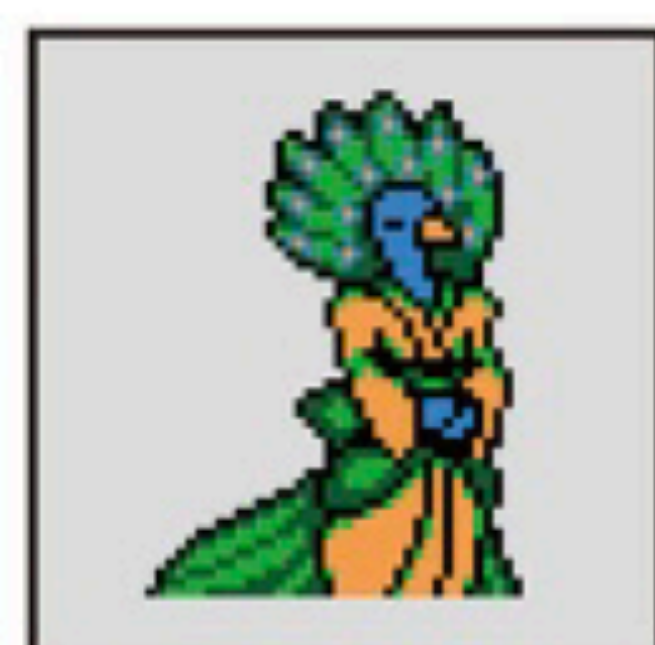
children



**CROAKER  
& TOADER**



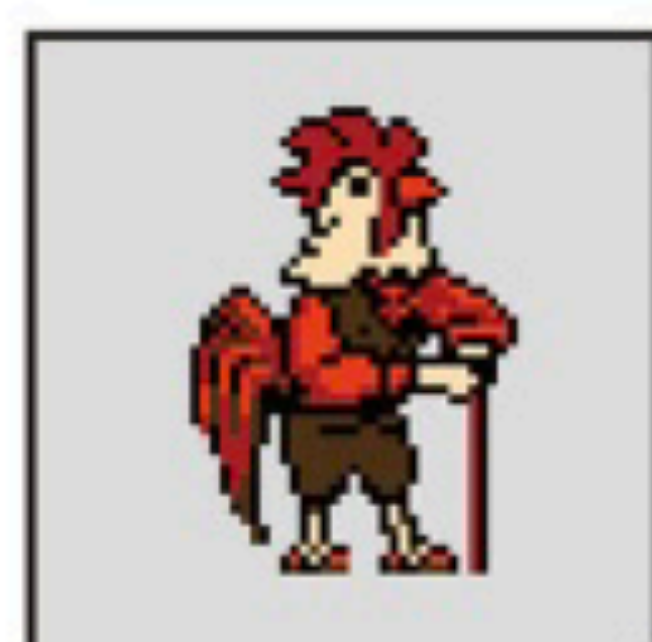
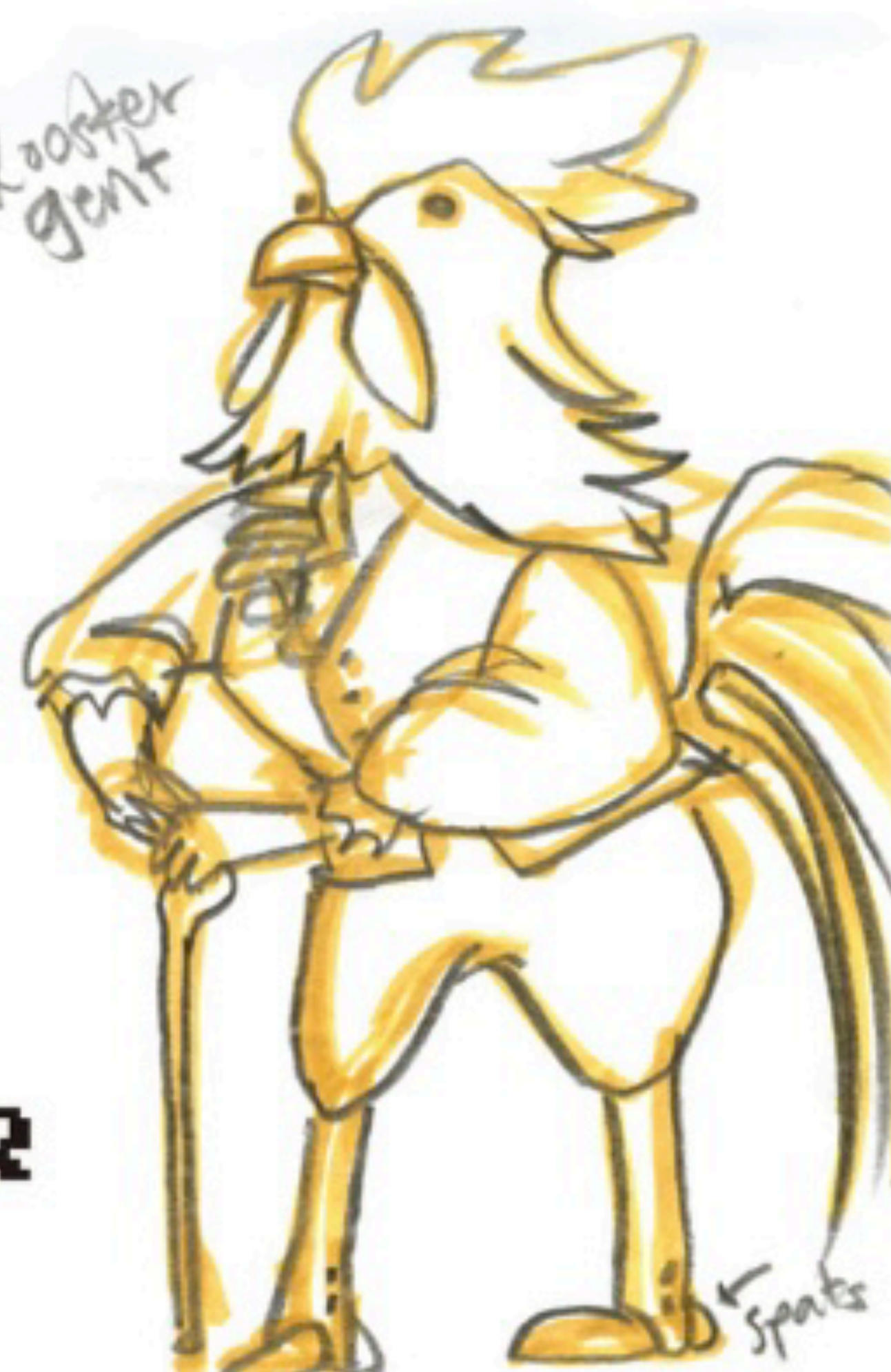
Pike  
Charming  
Pun Master



**PEACOCK  
GENT**



Rooster  
gent



**ROOSTER  
GENT**

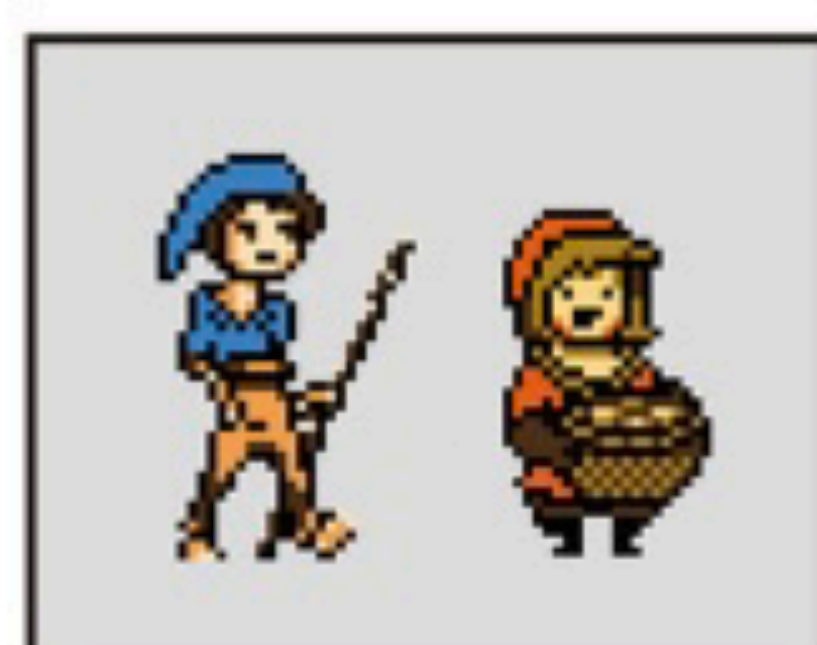
Can you believe that at one point, there wasn't a Toader?! We thought it would be funny to have someone who loves puns and another who hated them (and then we could have twice as many!), so we made Toader as a foil to Croaker.

DEV. COMMENTARY

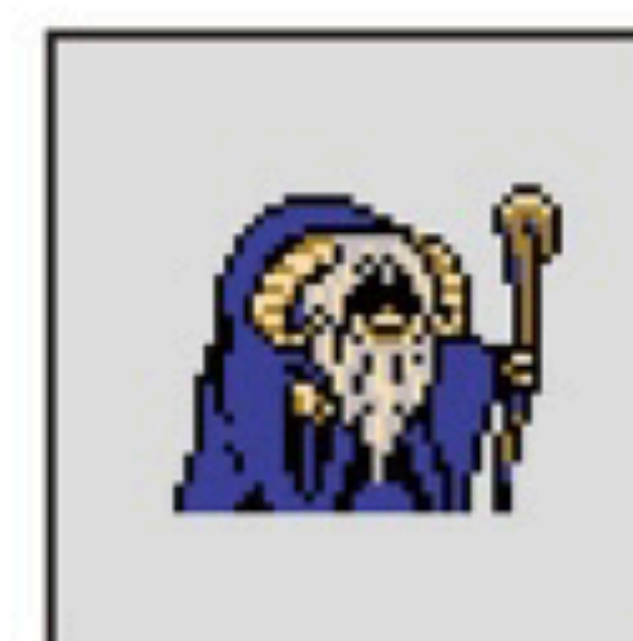
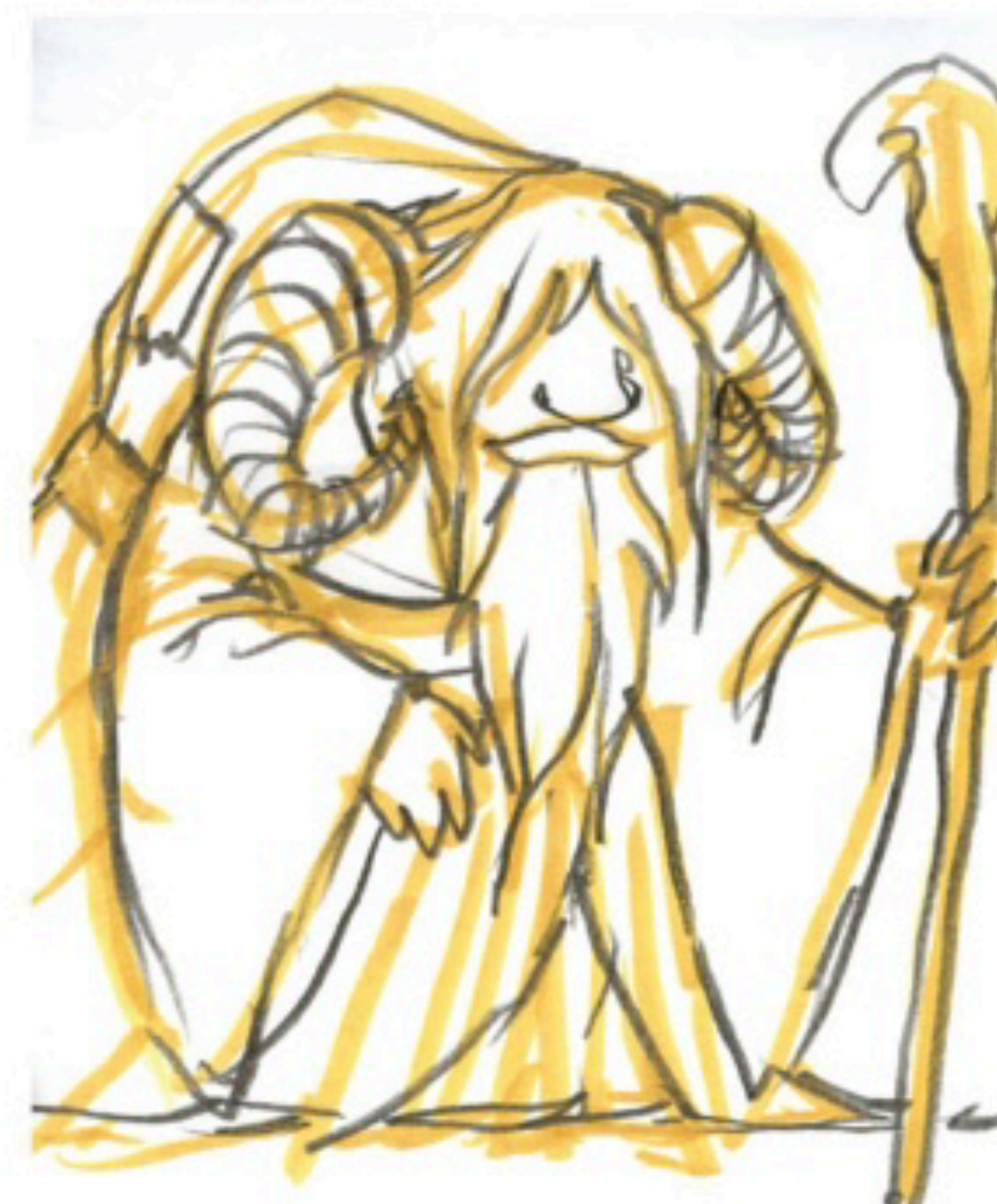


Lanky  
Shoemaker

Mushroom  
gatherer



**FISHERMAN  
& GATHERER**



**GRIZZLED  
SEER**



# VILLAGERS (CONTINUED)



Deer Lady



DEER LADY



Hedge Farmer



HEDGE FARMER



Yoppler Litto

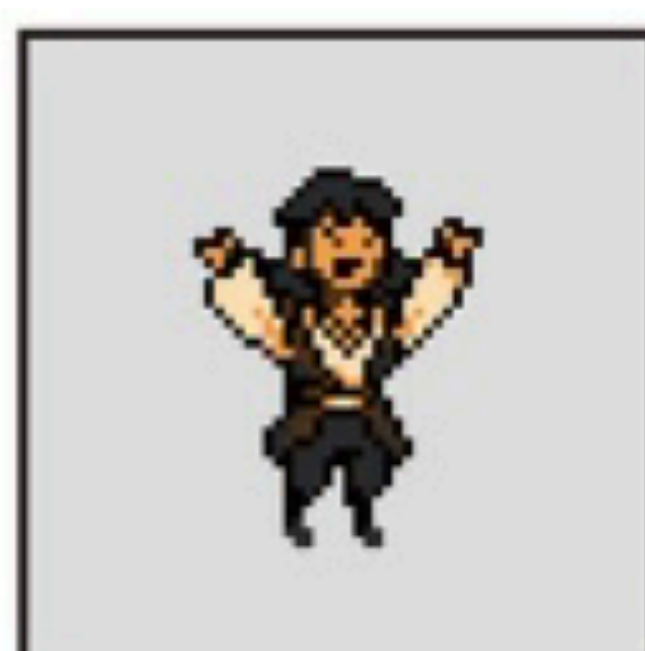
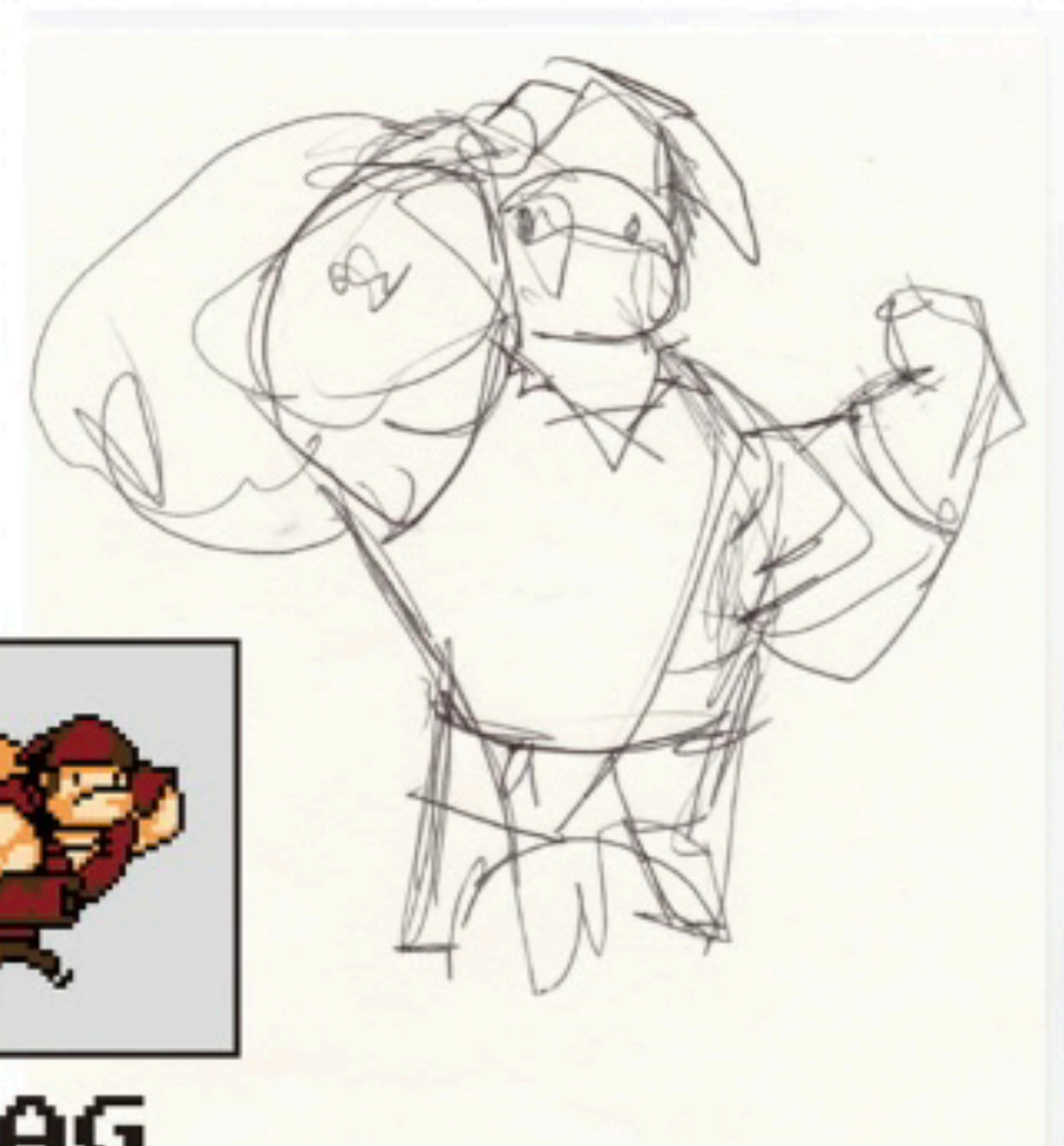
sounds  
horn  
@ purchase  
animated



THE YOPPLER



BAG FELLOW



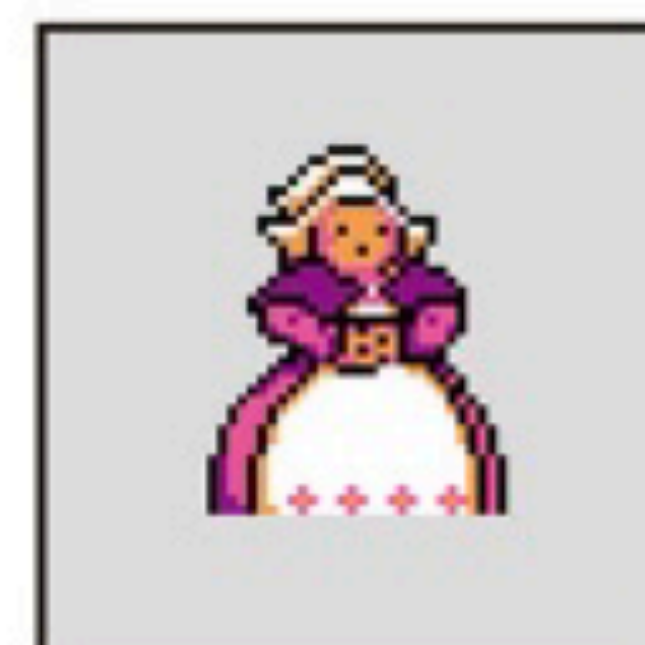
PIPPIN



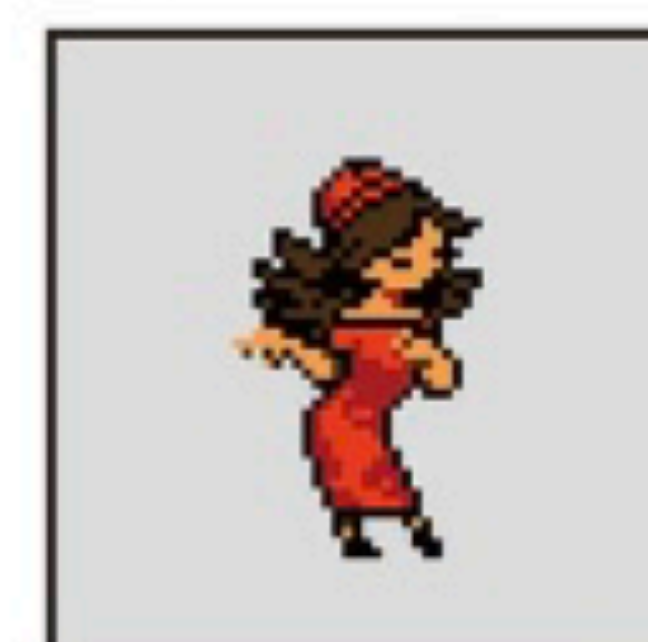
Shopkeep Hank

Simple  
comfy  
sit or sized

← Grecian



MATRON MOLLY



FLOWER DOLLY



Matron Molly

delightful  
and  
goody

maybe  
knits



Flower dolly

Vain & sleepy  
talks w/ hand  
Flowers in hair?

Sloppy boots

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We wanted to have only one Zelda II-style town, but we designed so many villagers that we ended up having to create a second village (the armory) to house all the unique characters and personalities.





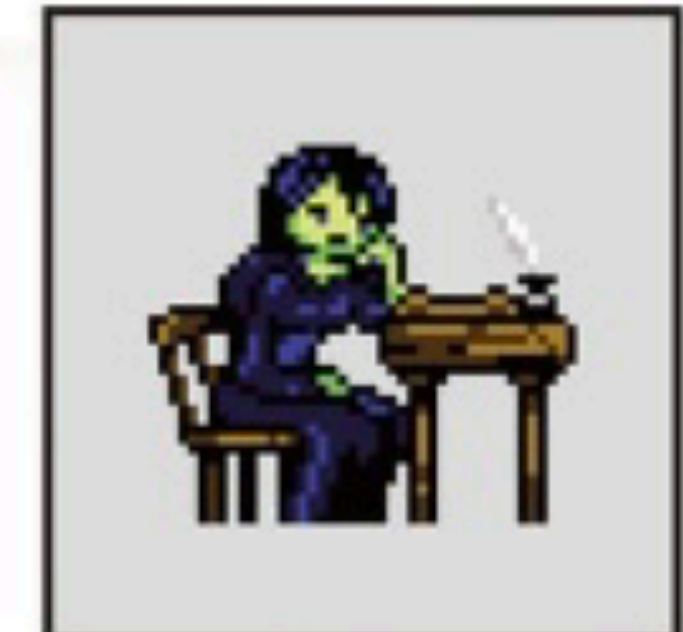
# DEV. COMMENTARY

Mona was designed as a listless, mopey character, which is why her initial sketch labeled her full name as Mona Mopes!

Mona Mopes  
dark  
sags (creepy)  
stree TMI  
likes lit  
candles

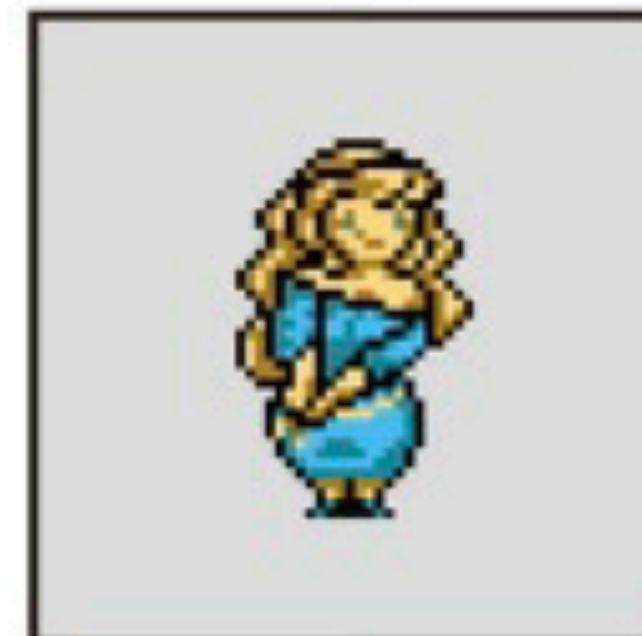


**DANCING GIRL**



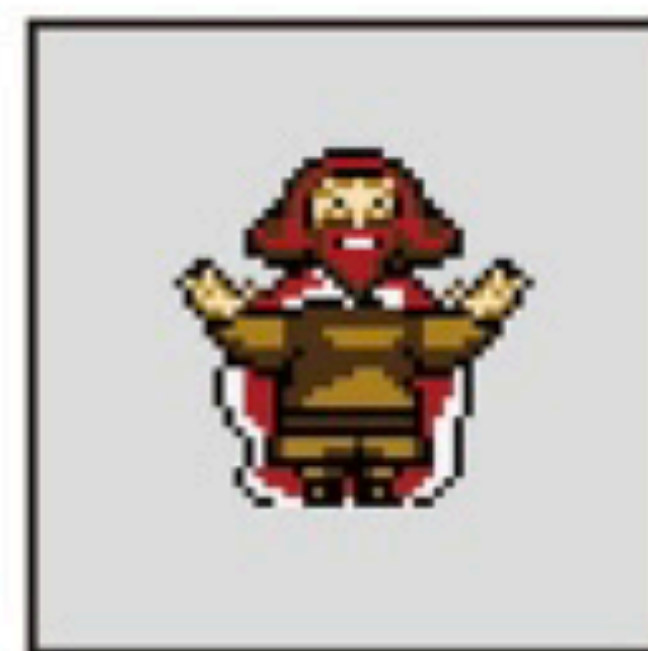
**MONA**

Mary Sweets  
Simple-ish  
shy  
smiley  
sympathetic

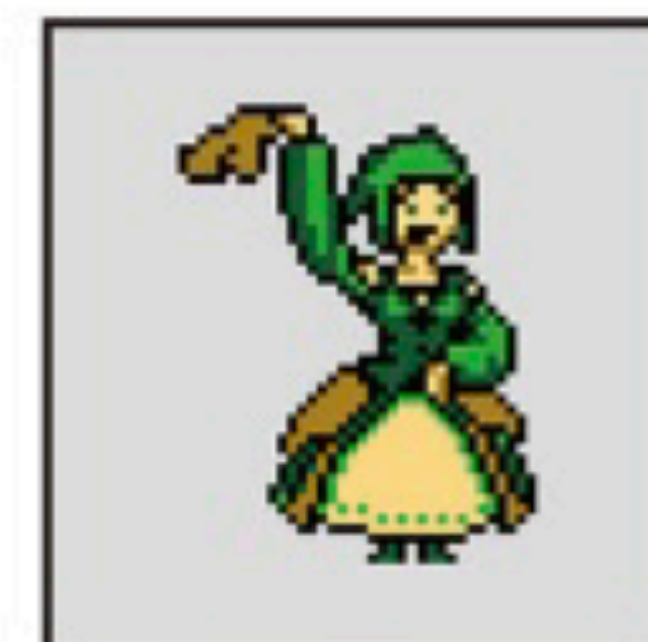


**MARY SWEETS**

deposed king



**DEPOSED KING**



**JUICE MAID**

Lisa  
Banana



Leo Grands  
bushy mane  
cravat  
diamond earring  
huffs knuckles  
& cleans on shirt



**LEO GRANDS**



**?????**



**FARRELS & LADY KNIGHT**



bowlcut



Valiant  
Farrels  
good natured  
semi-knight

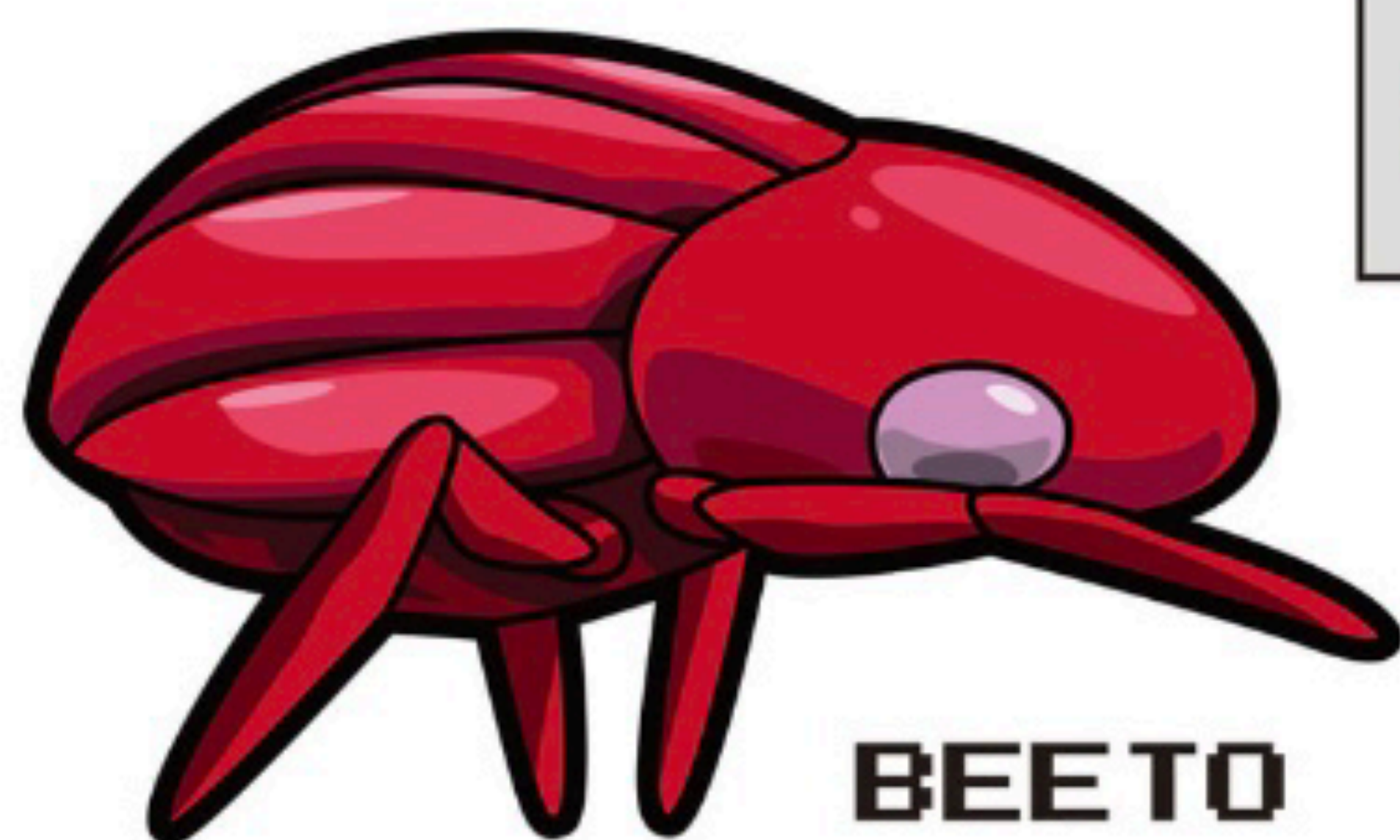


Lady  
McKnight

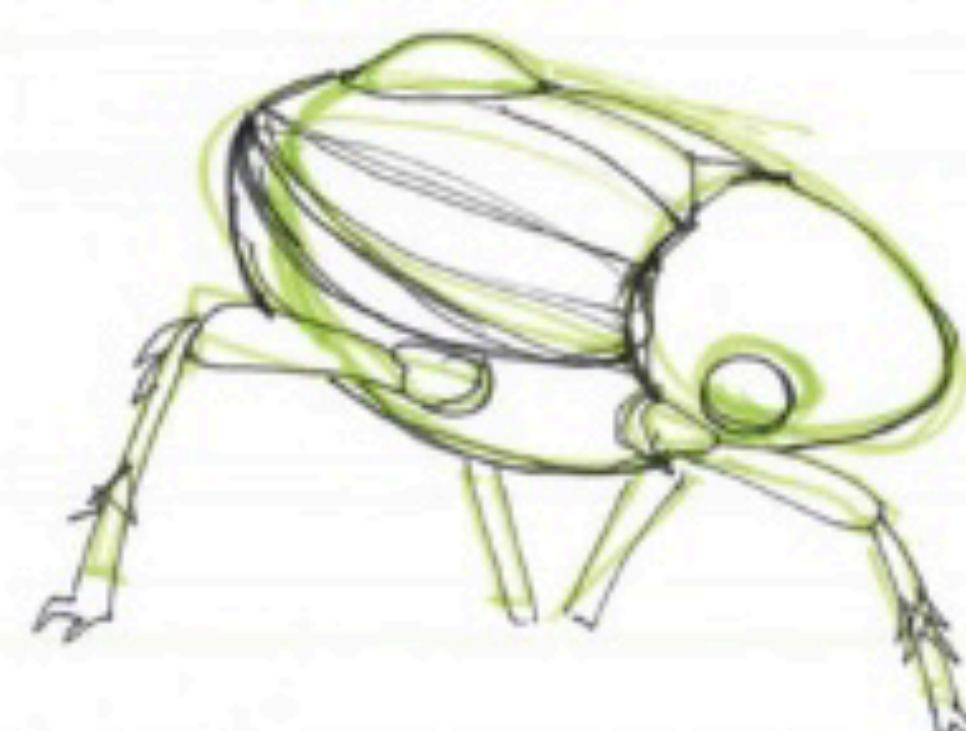
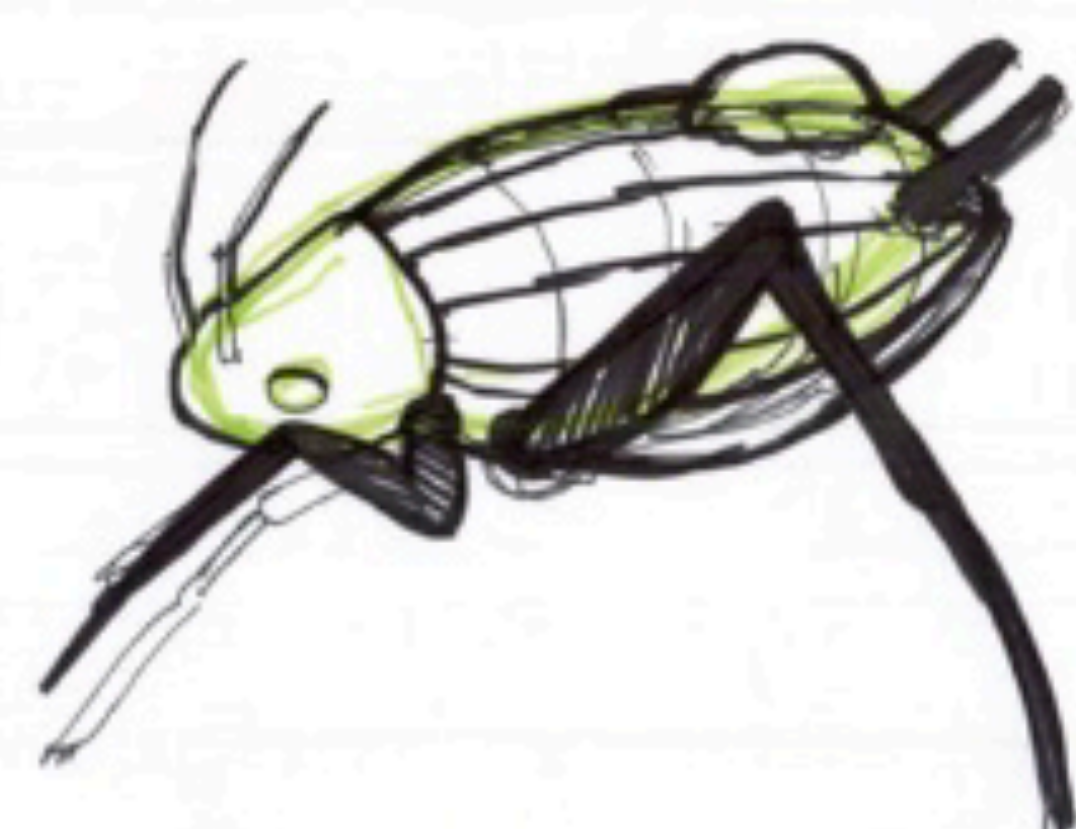
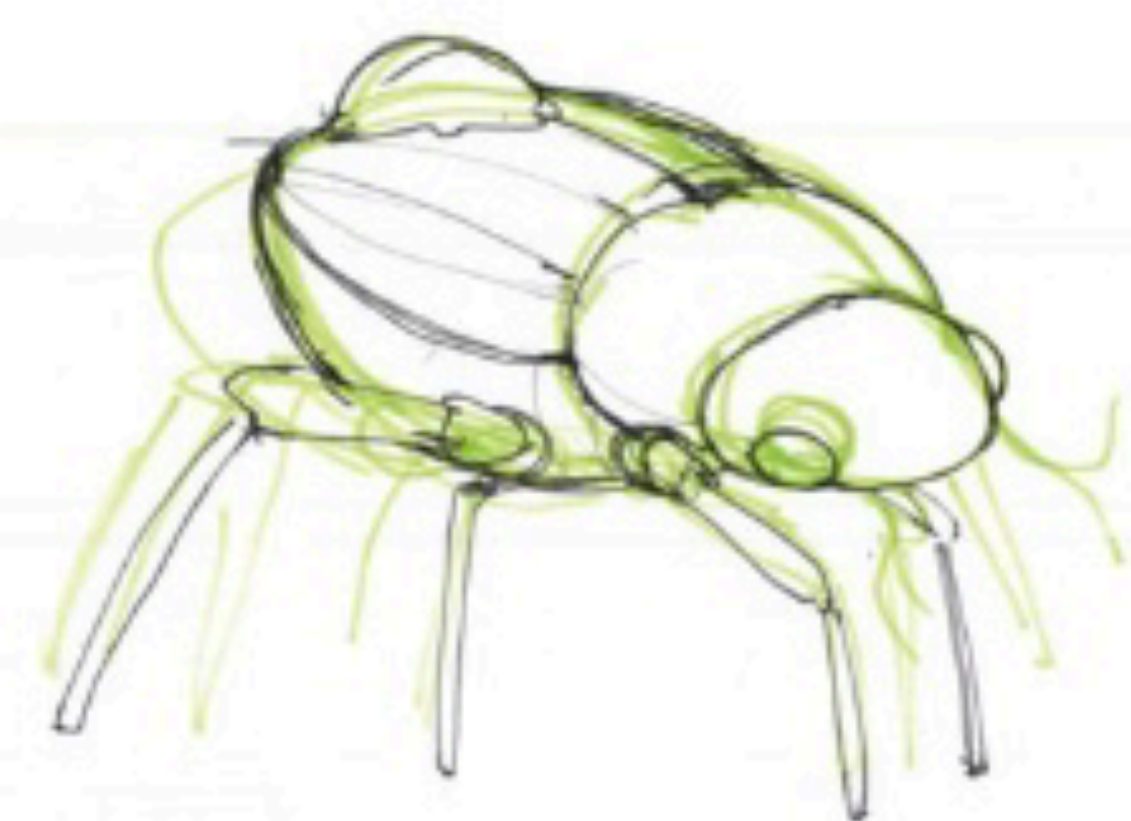
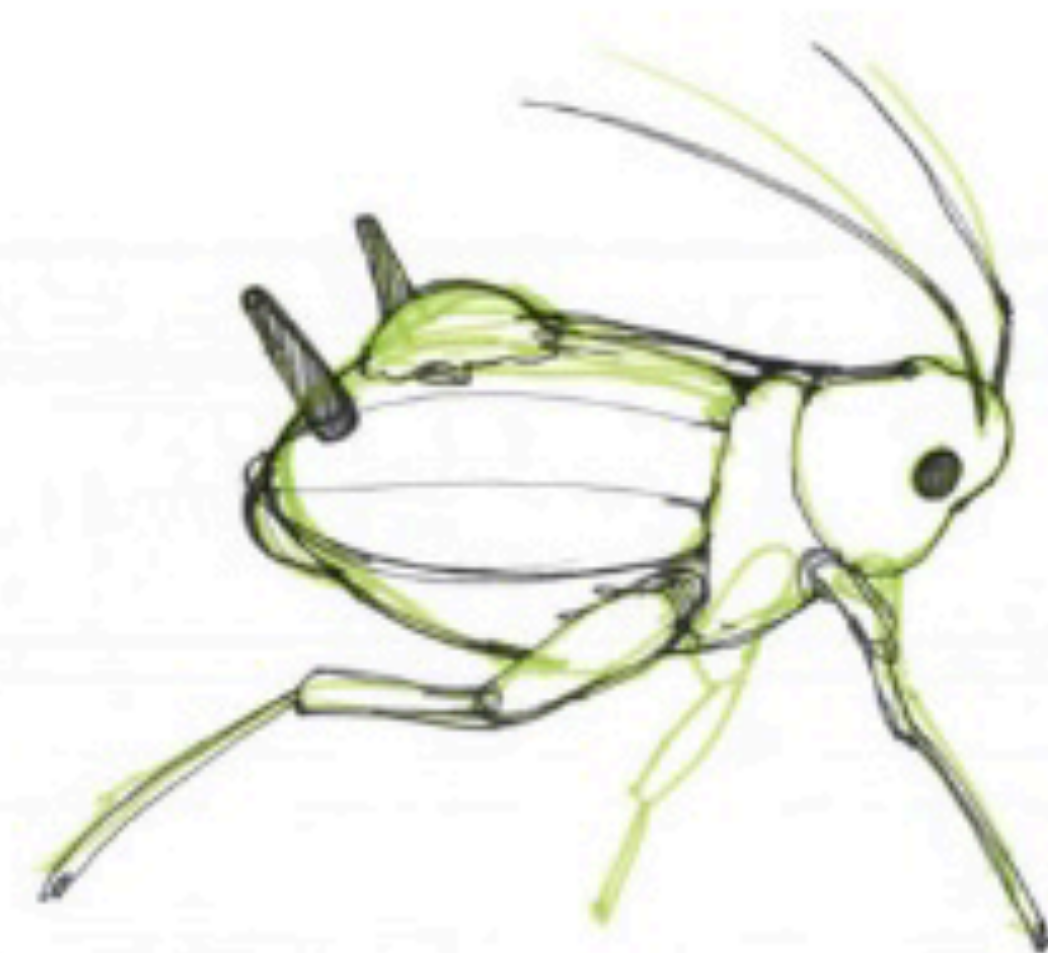
Keeps  
shop for  
her family  
wishes for  
adventure  
instead



# ENEMIES



BEETO

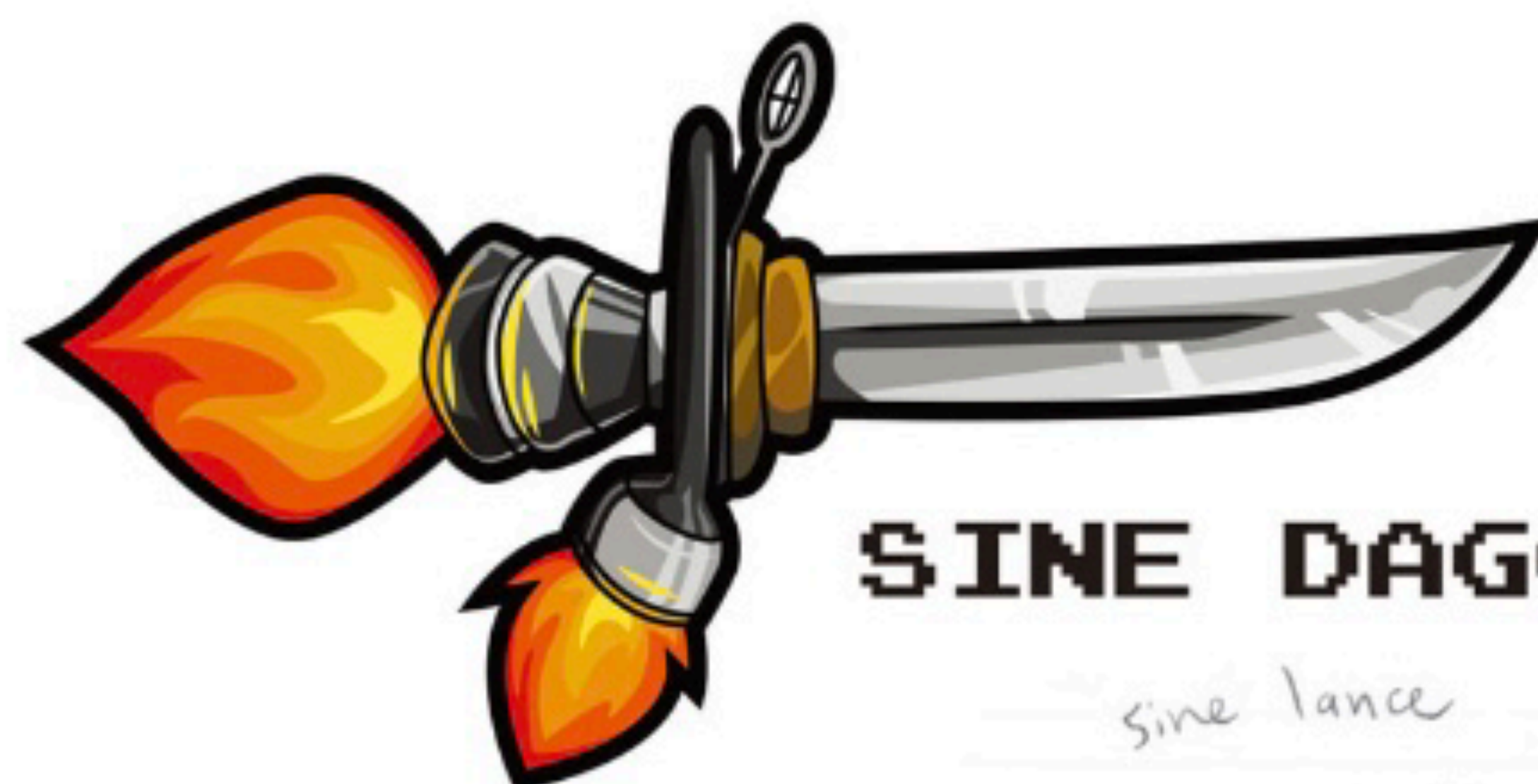


BIG BOHTO



## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Beeto is the first enemy you encounter, but Beeto wasn't the first beetle we made! Actually, the "first enemy" role was originally going to go to an enemy simply called "Turtle," which (as you might expect) was protected by its shell and had to be flipped over before you could defeat it. We ended up pulling it from the game, though, as it was too complex for the game's intro.



SINE DAGGER



sine lance

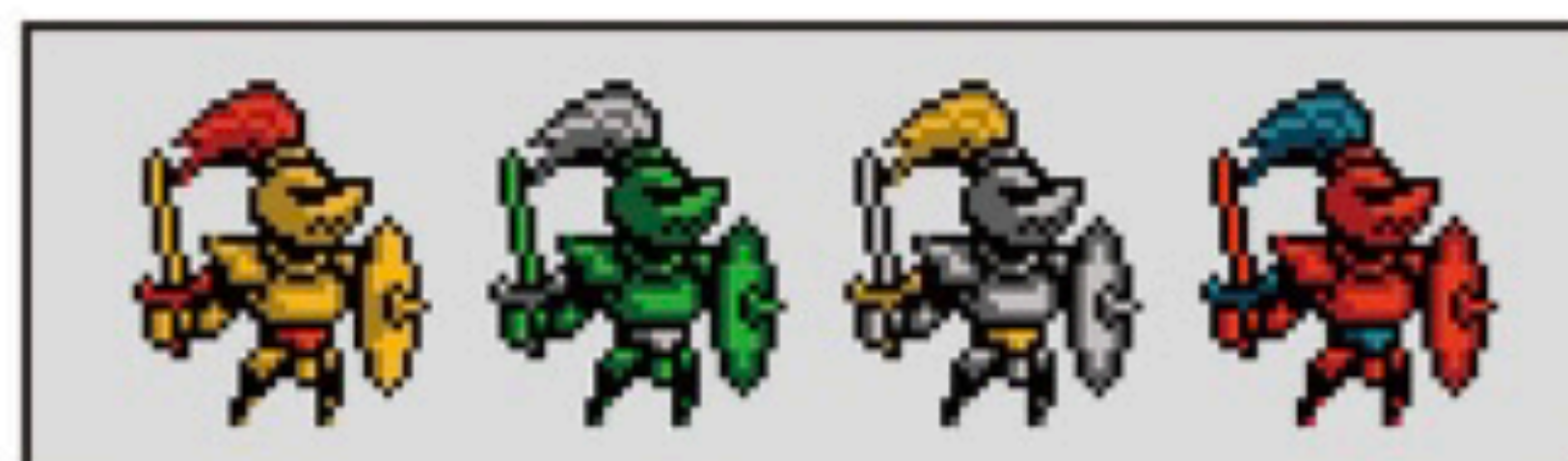


## DEV. COMMENTARY

The Sine Dagger is based on the Sine Knife from previous games we've worked on (BloodRayne: Betrayal and Double Dragon Neon). It's a jet-propelled knife with a scope!



GOLDARMOR



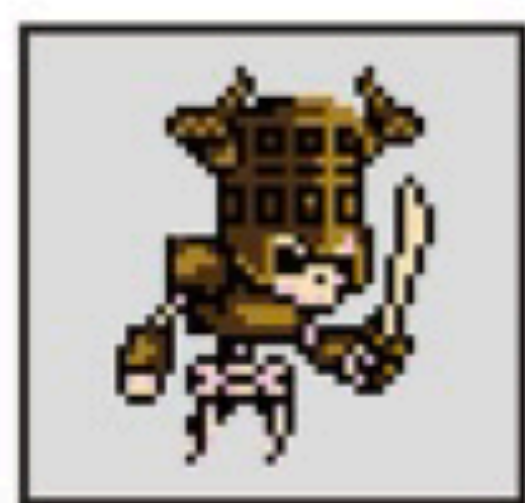
## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

The Goldarmors and Wizzems were designed as our platonic enemies: recurring nuisances throughout the game. When you think Shovel Knight enemies, these should be the first to come to mind!

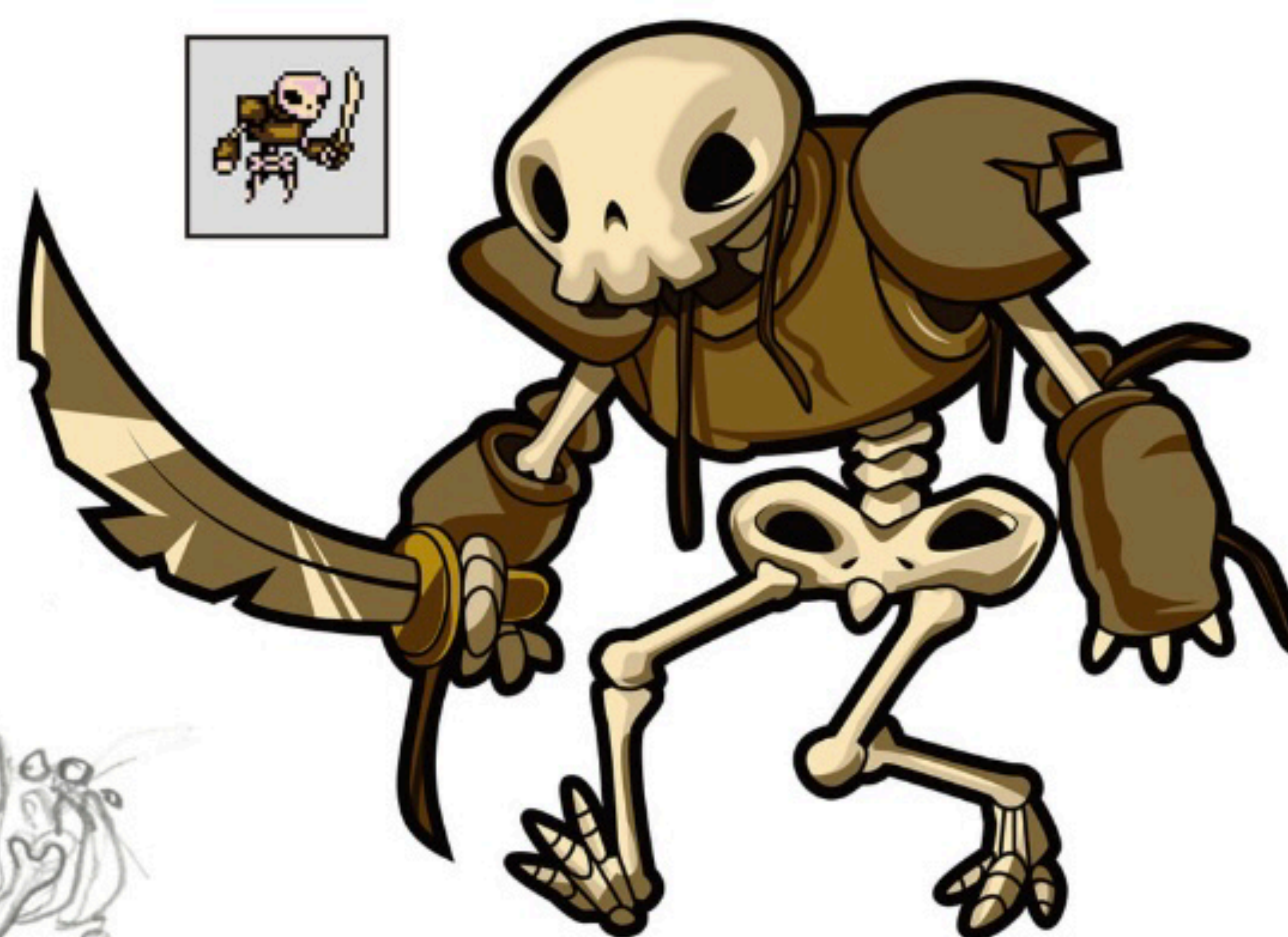


## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

The Boneclang Honchos were created with huge skull helmets because the standard Boneclang's skull didn't look heavy enough to weigh down the platforms in the Lich Yard.



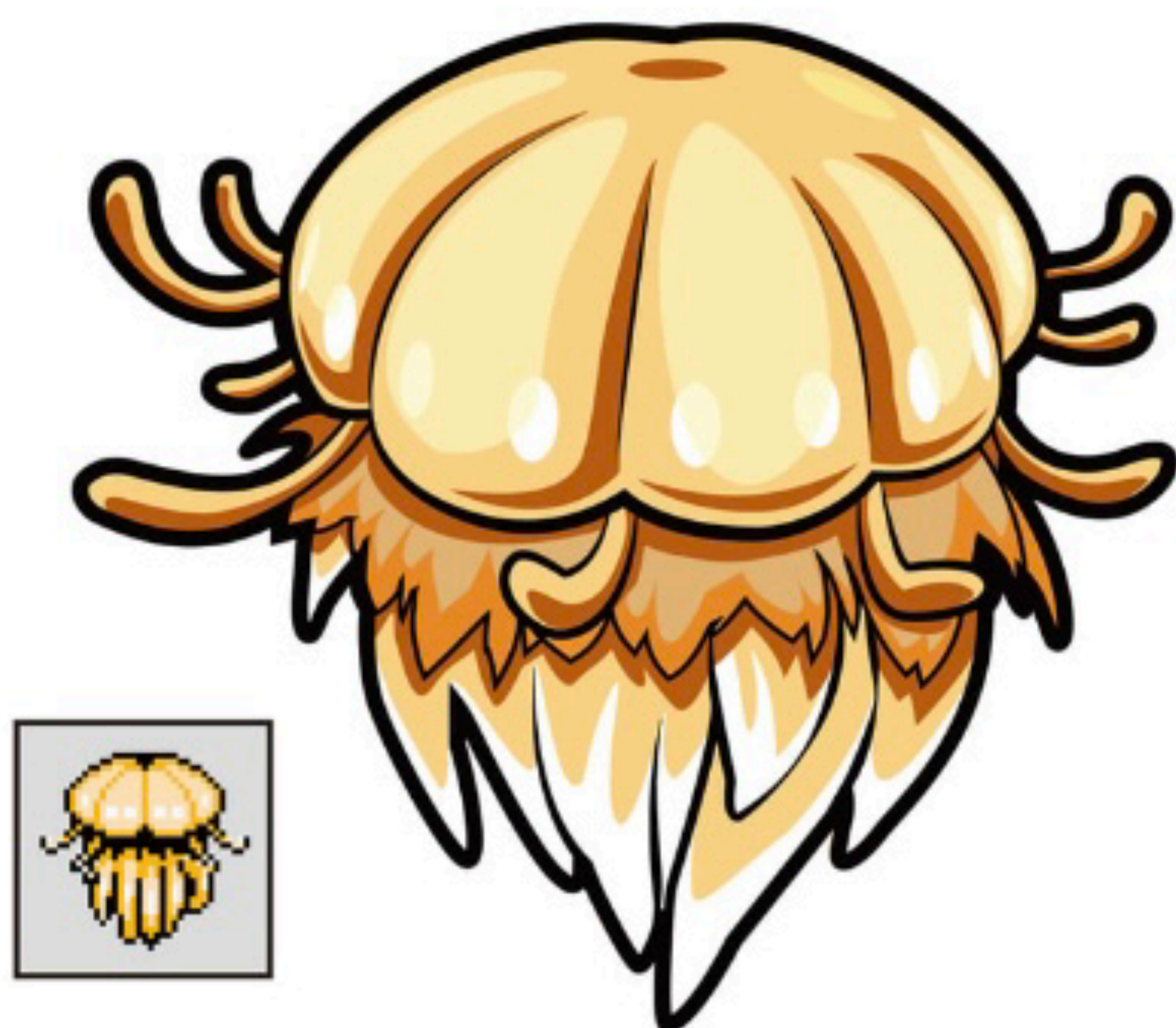
**BONECLANG  
HONCHO**



**BONECLANG**



**WIZZEM**



**FLOATSOME**

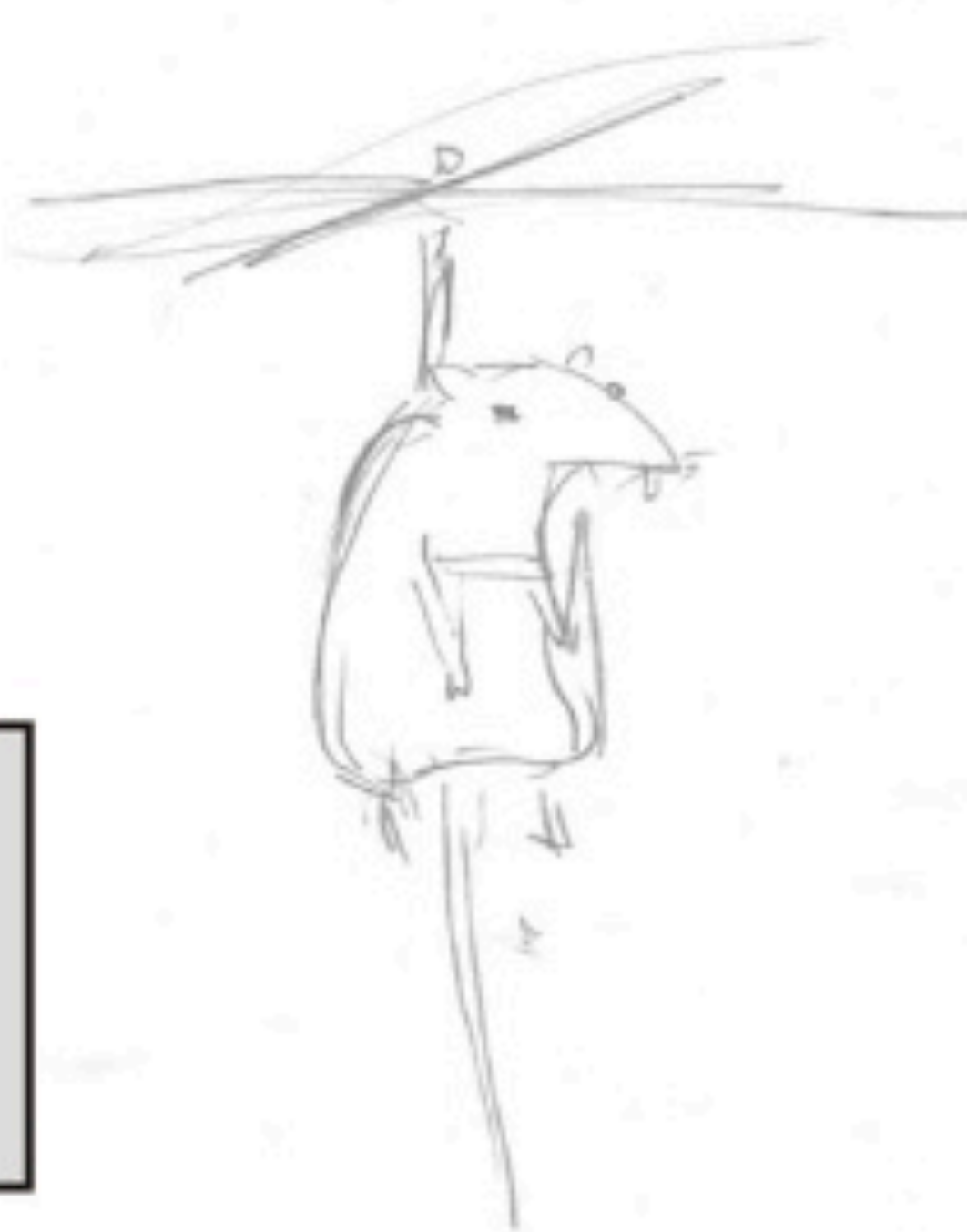
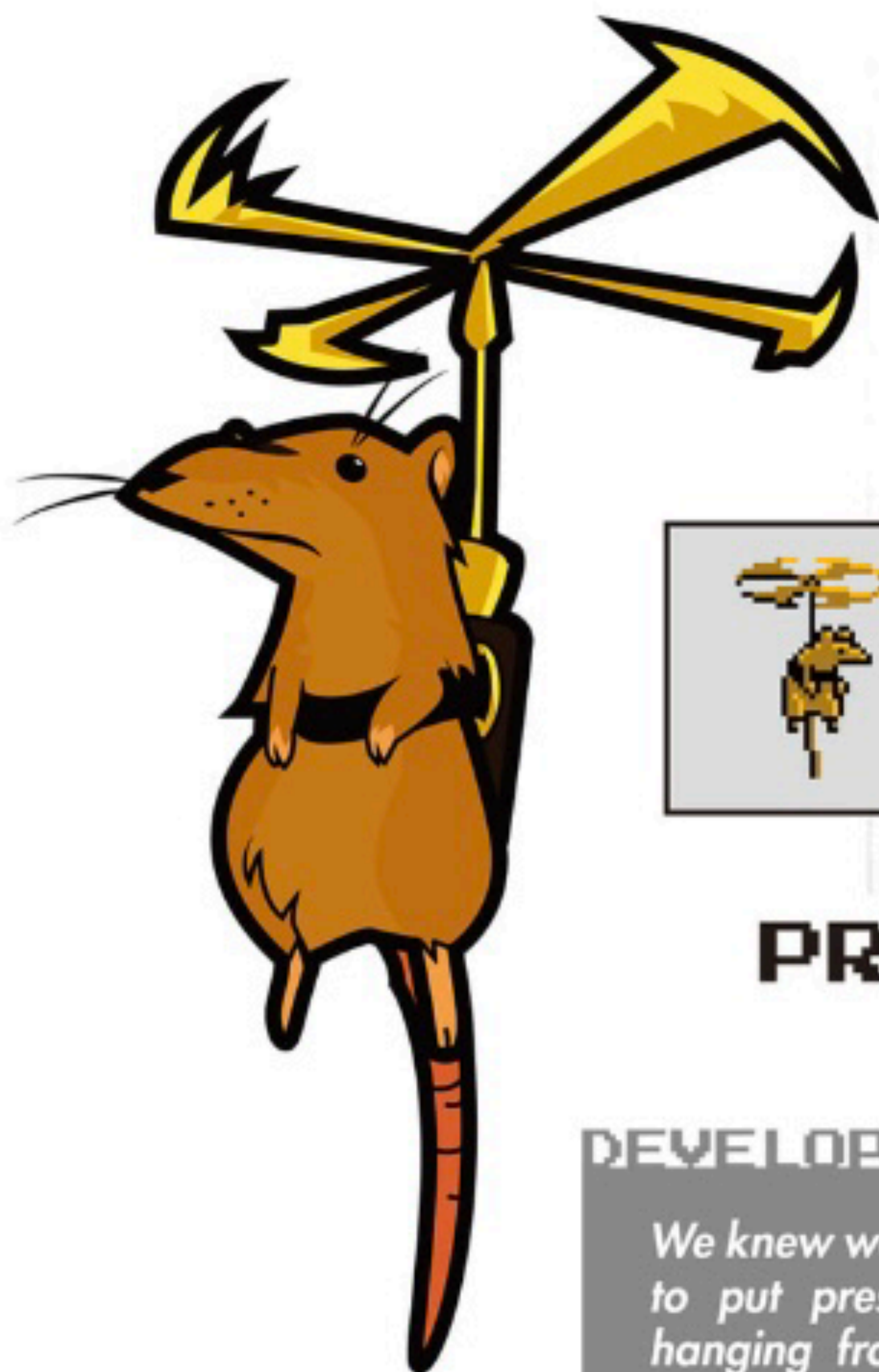


## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Upon defeat, Floatsome originally spawned smaller jellyfish that would home in on the player. We found this behavior very disruptive and dangerous, though, and had to ditch the little guys.



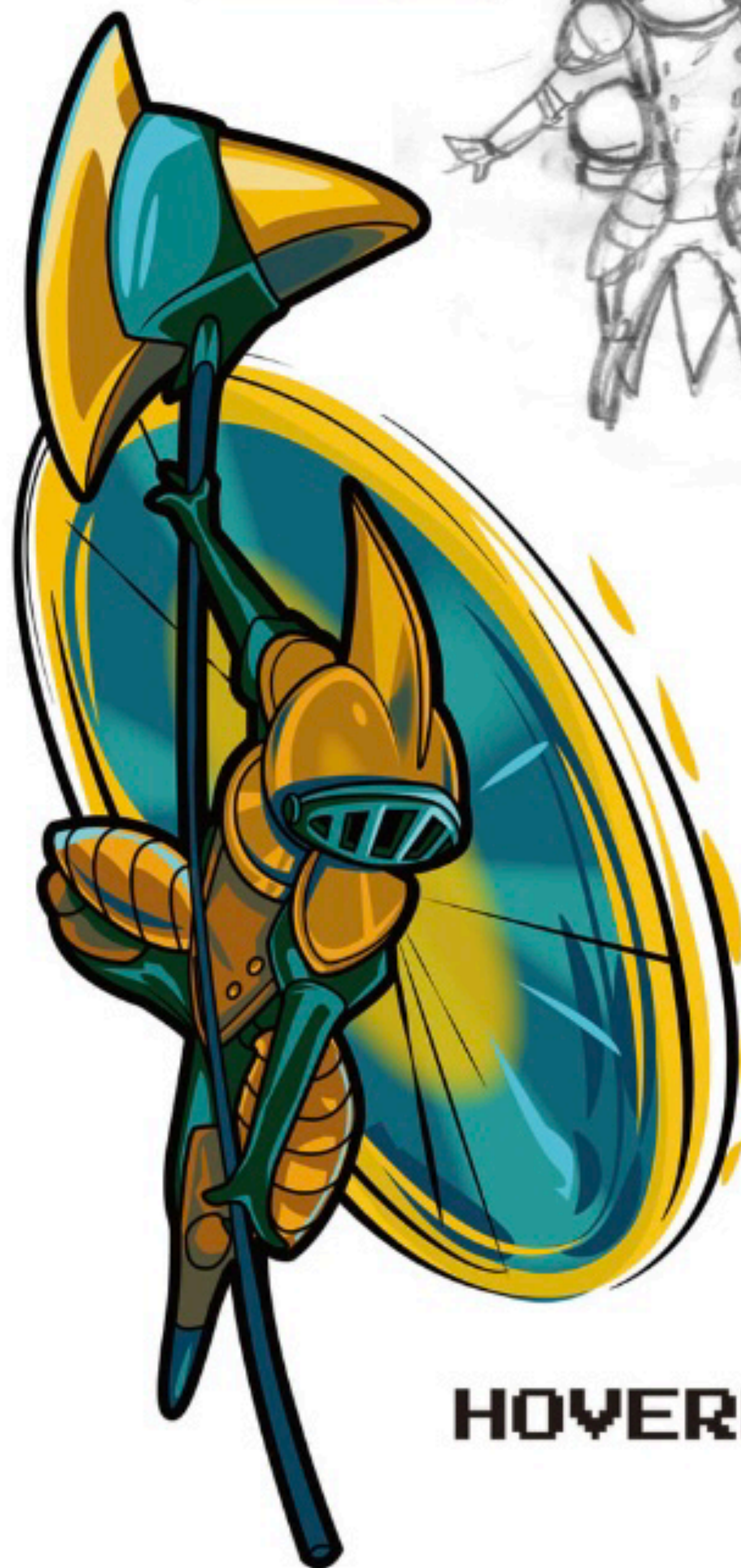
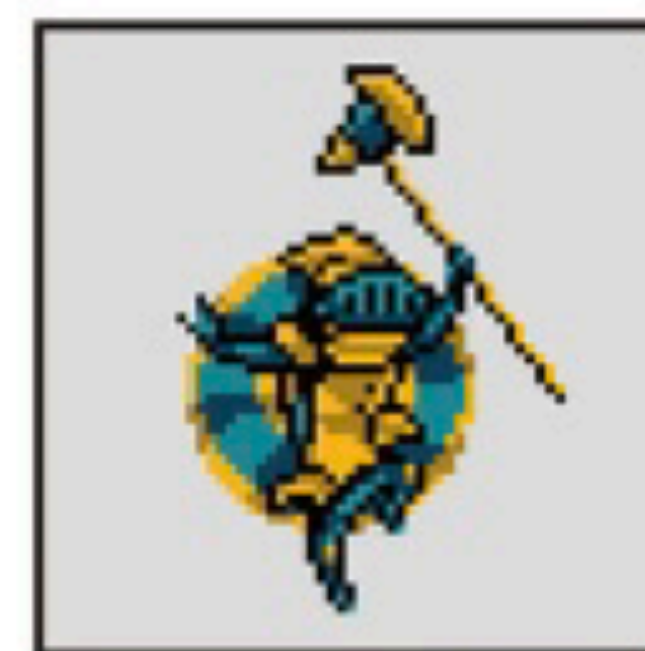
## ENEMIES (CONTINUED)



### PROPELLER RAT

#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We knew we needed a slow flying enemy to put pressure on the player. A rat hanging from a self-propelled machine was suggested, but the team didn't think it would read like an NES sprite or might be too goofy. We laid out a temporary design anyway, though, and it immediately stuck. The Propeller Rat set the tone of levity for many of the enemy designs that would come after it.



### HOVERHAFT



### GRIFFOTH

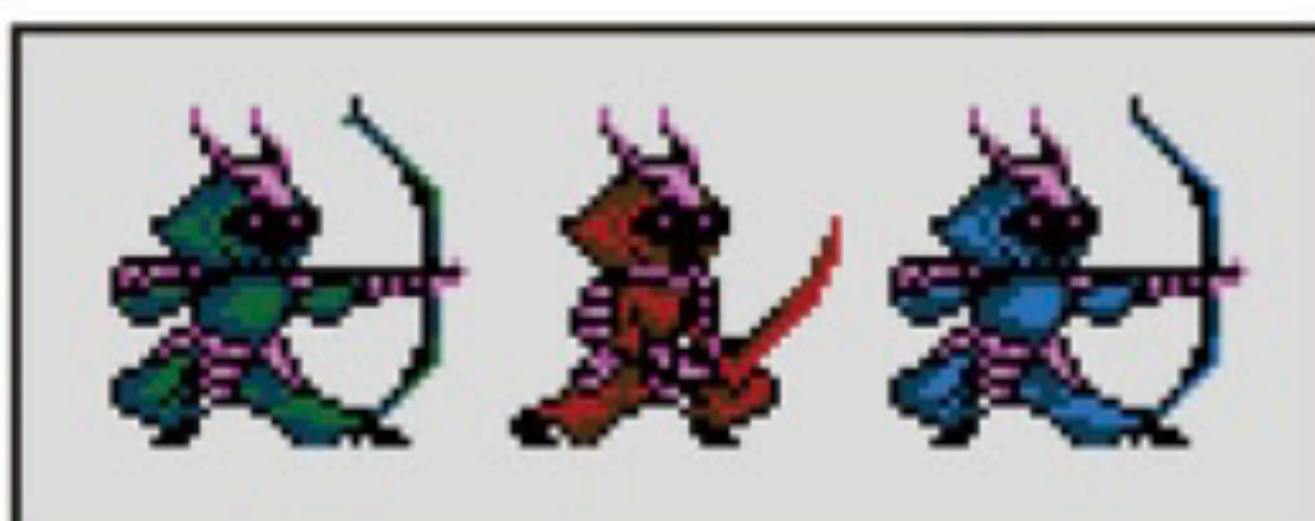


#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

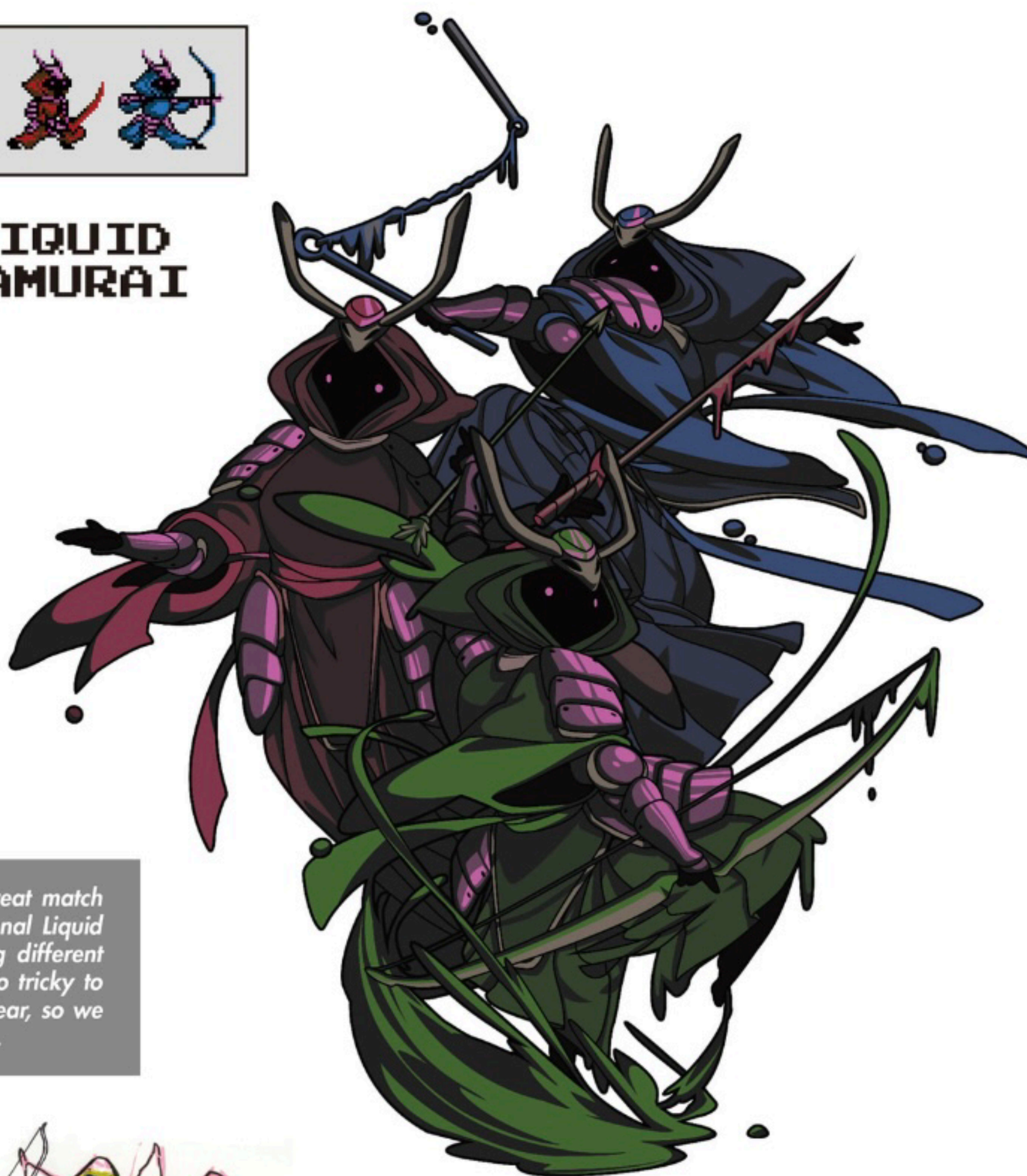
Griffoth was the first large enemy we made and helped inform the visual rules and language for other large sprites. He was originally much more fluidly animated, but this was eventually limited to his tail and face to match the NES' capabilities.







## LIQUID SAMURAI



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

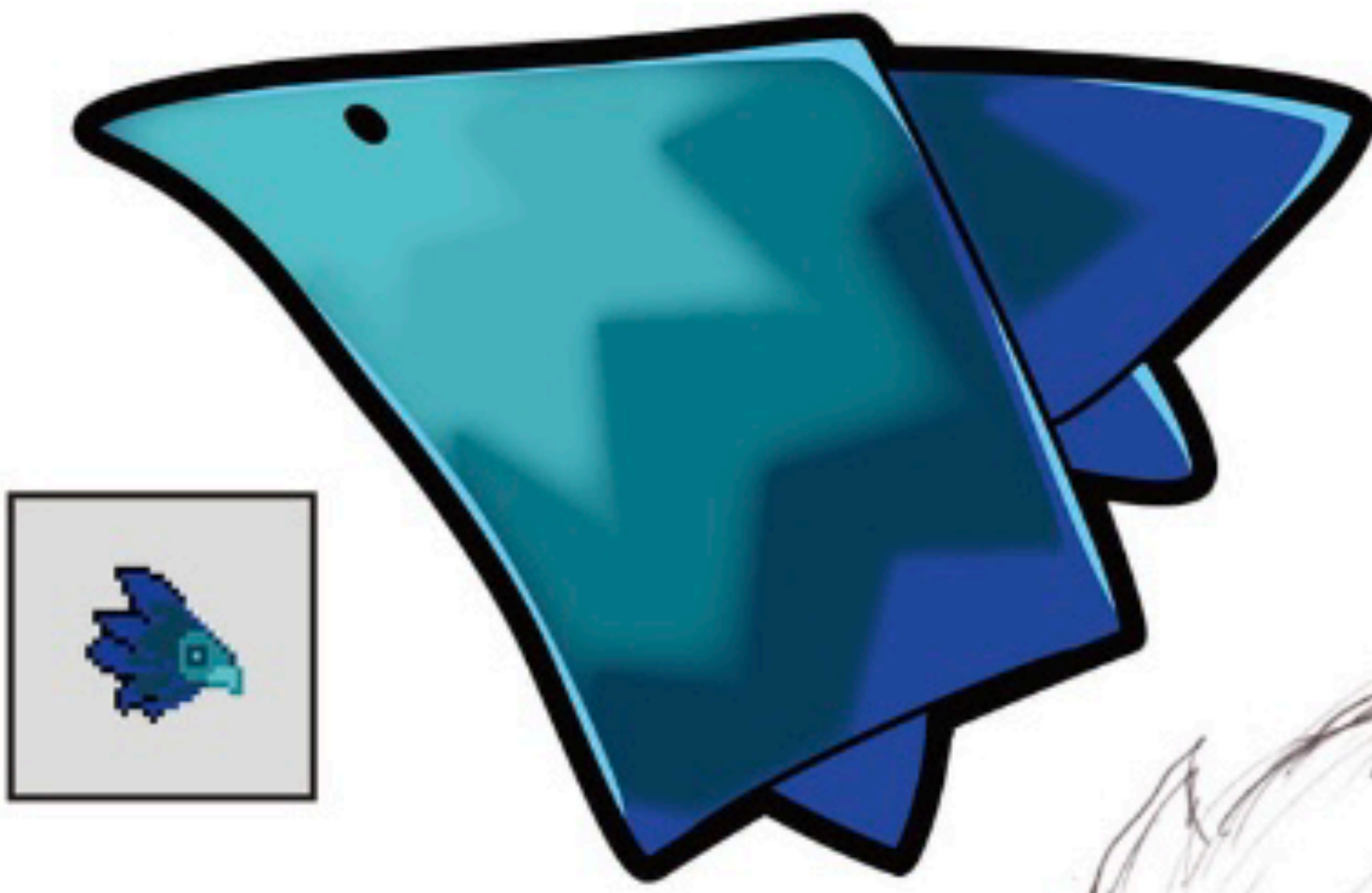
The Liquid Samurai ended up being a great match for the Tower stages. There were additional Liquid Samurai designs that saw them wielding different weapons - such as a flail - but it was too tricky to make all the differences between them clear, so we focused on only the bow and sword forms.

The Liquid Samurai were directed by Max VanDuyne.

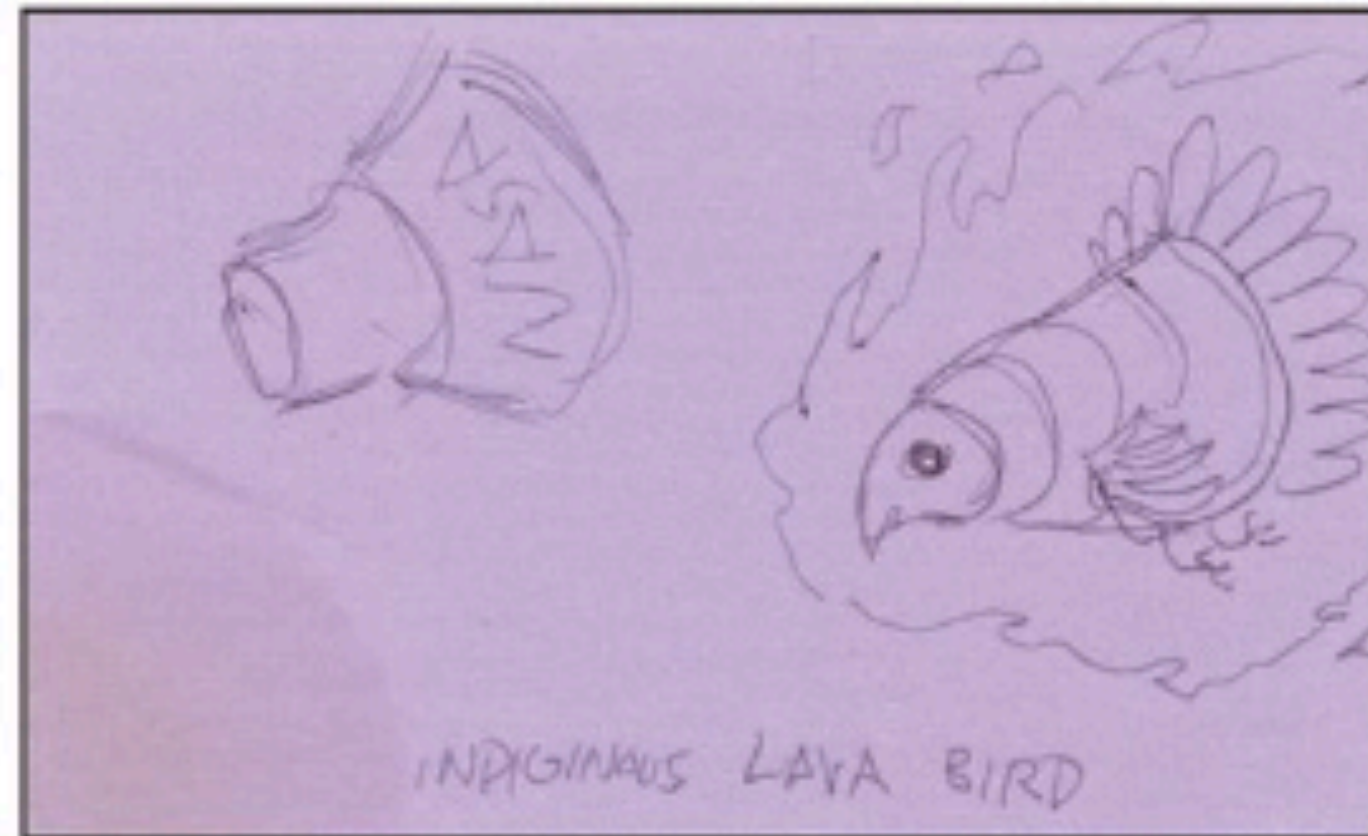




## ENEMIES (CONTINUED)

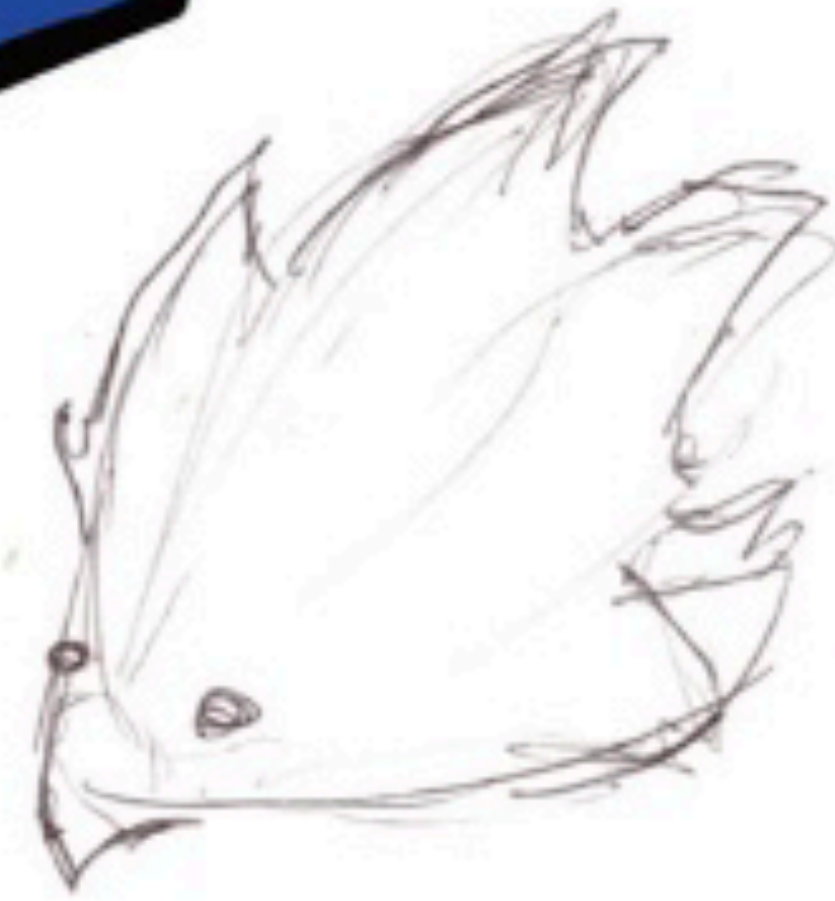


**BIRDER**

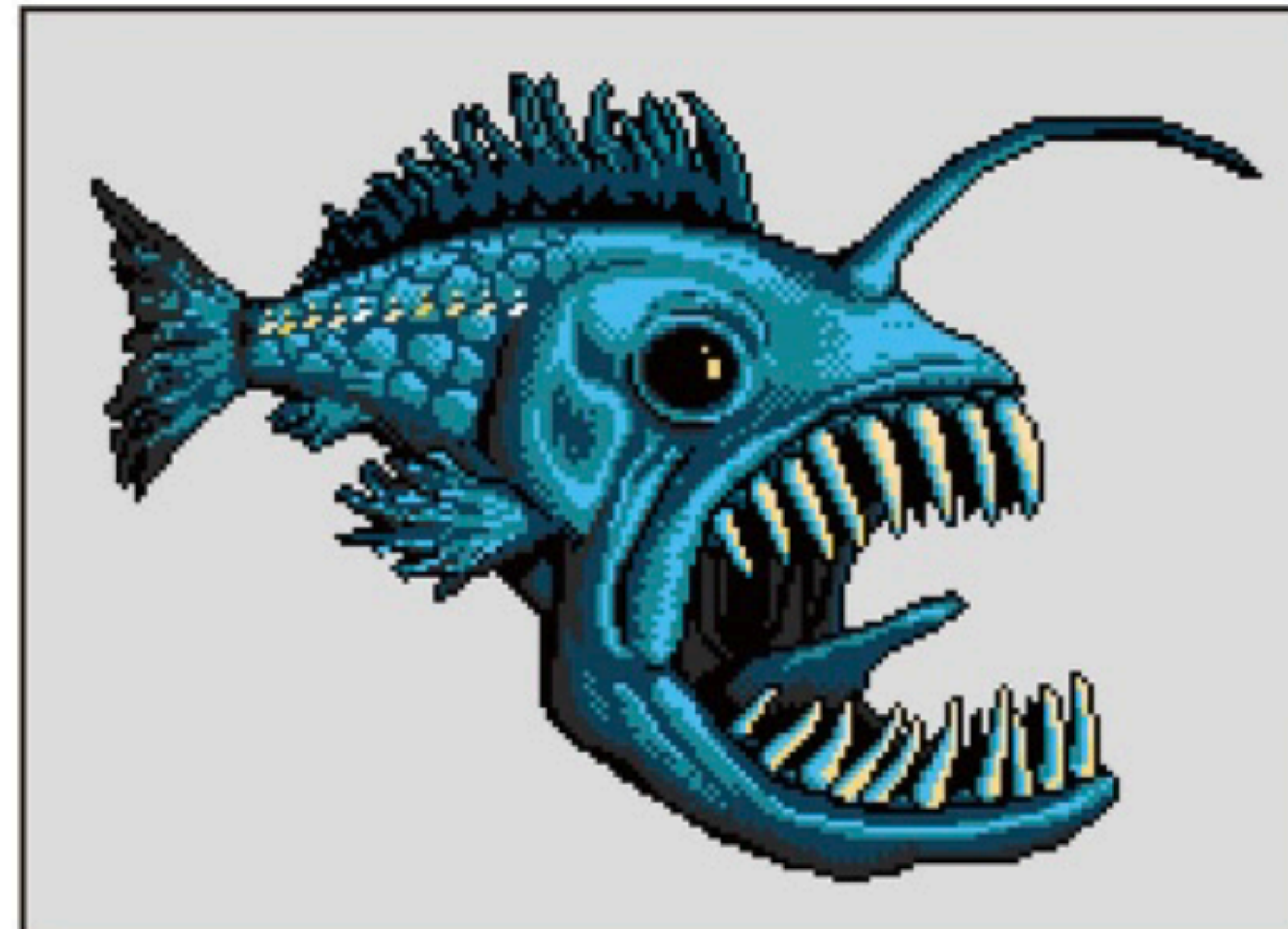


### DEV. COMMENTARY

*Birder started as a cool bird head design! It was only intended to be the head of a larger creature, but it ultimately became the whole enemy itself.*



**MOLER**



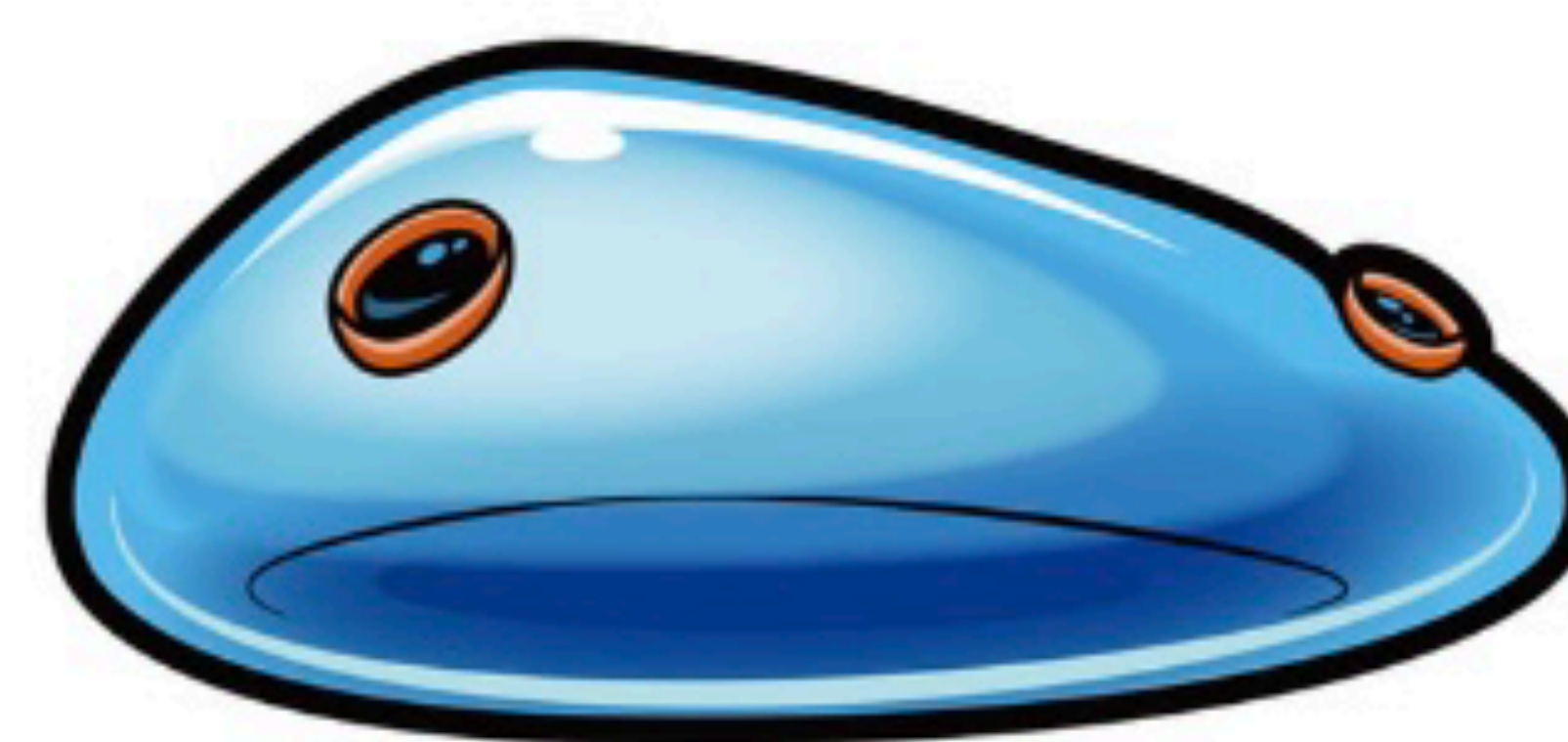
**TEETHALON**



**THE BIG CREEP**

### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*We never planned for the Big Creep to appear, but we wanted an exciting end to punctuate the Hall of Champions. Other stages end with a boss encounter, but who would be the boss of a bunch of ghosts? A bigger ghost!*



**BLORB**



**INVISISHADE**







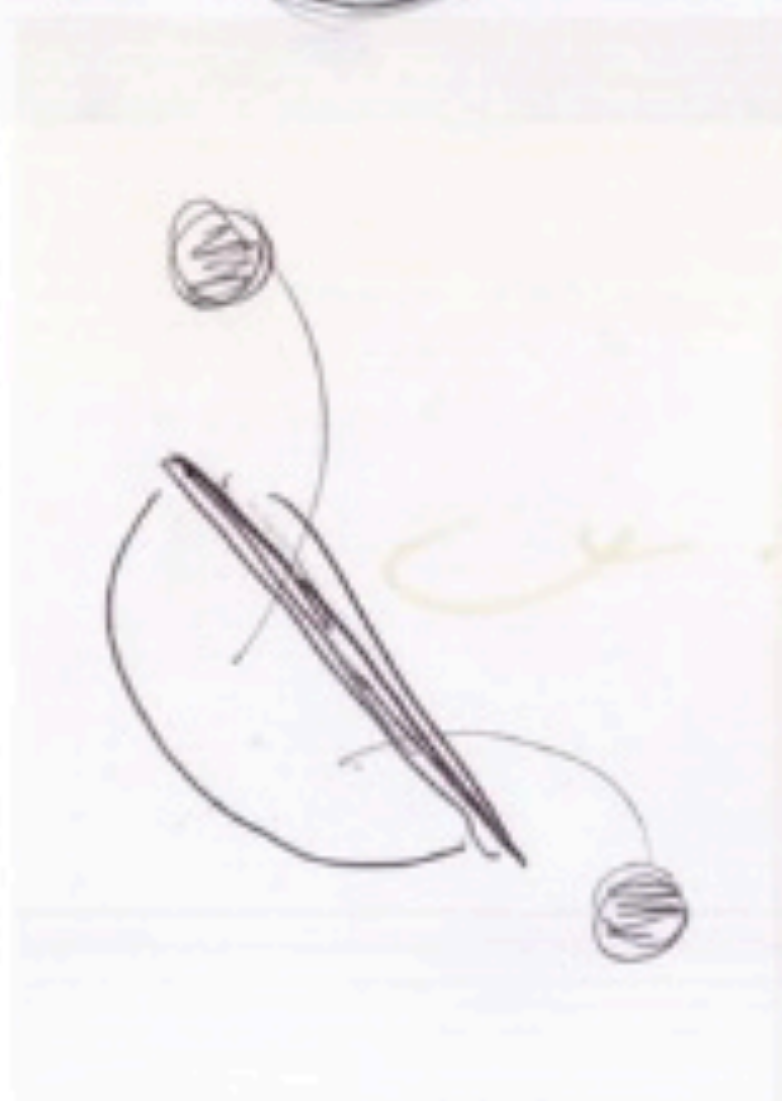
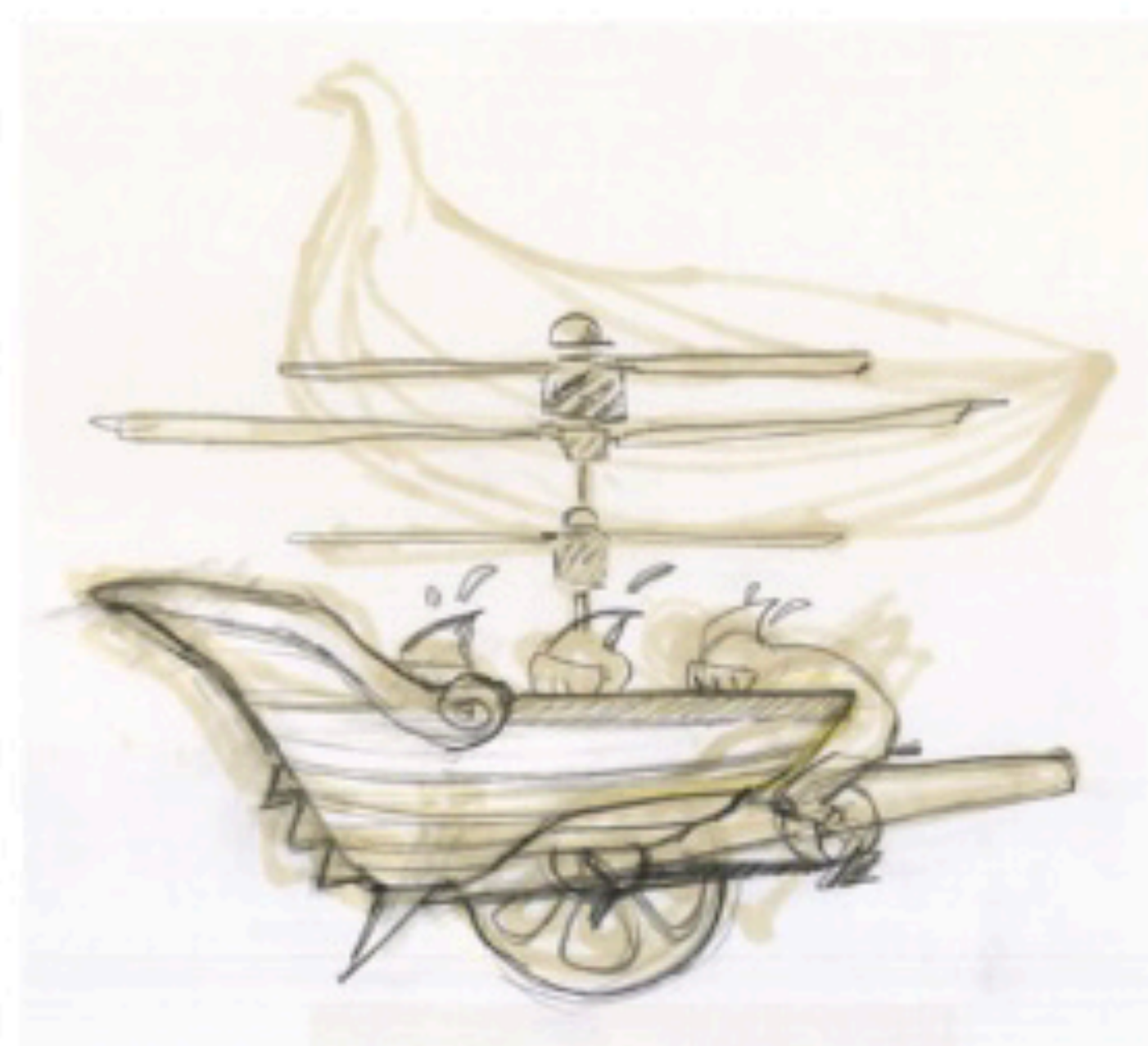
**SPINWULF**



**HERMITTACK**



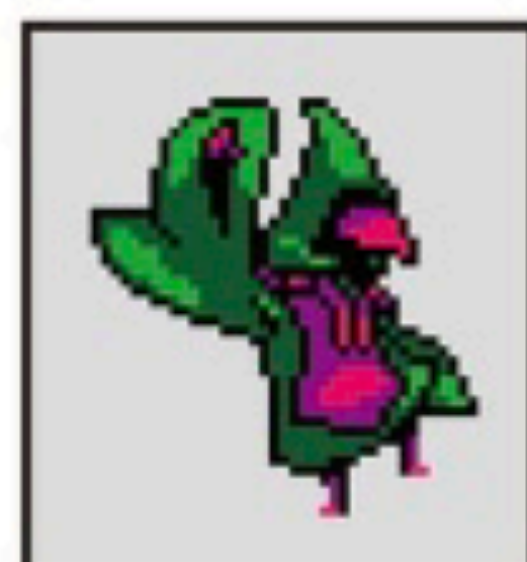
**BLITZSTEED**



**THE DINGHY DROPPER**



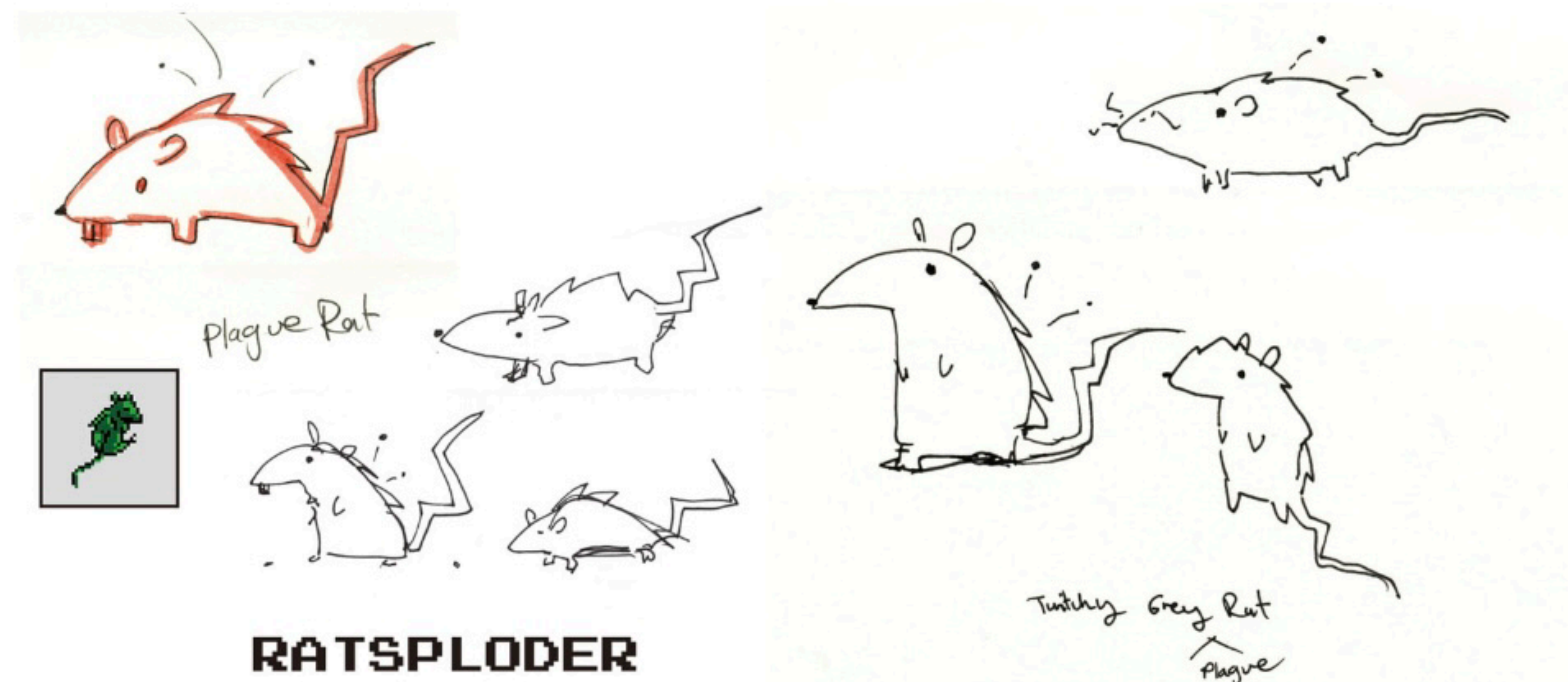
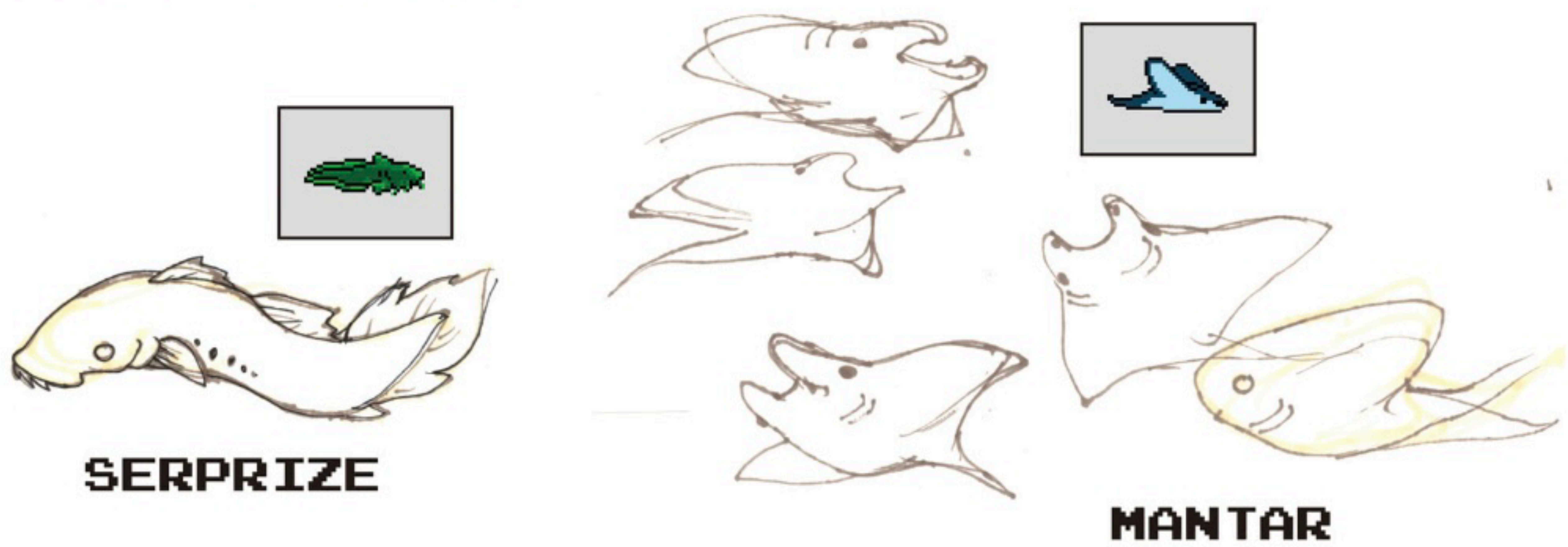
**PLAGUE MINION**



**COGSLOTTER**

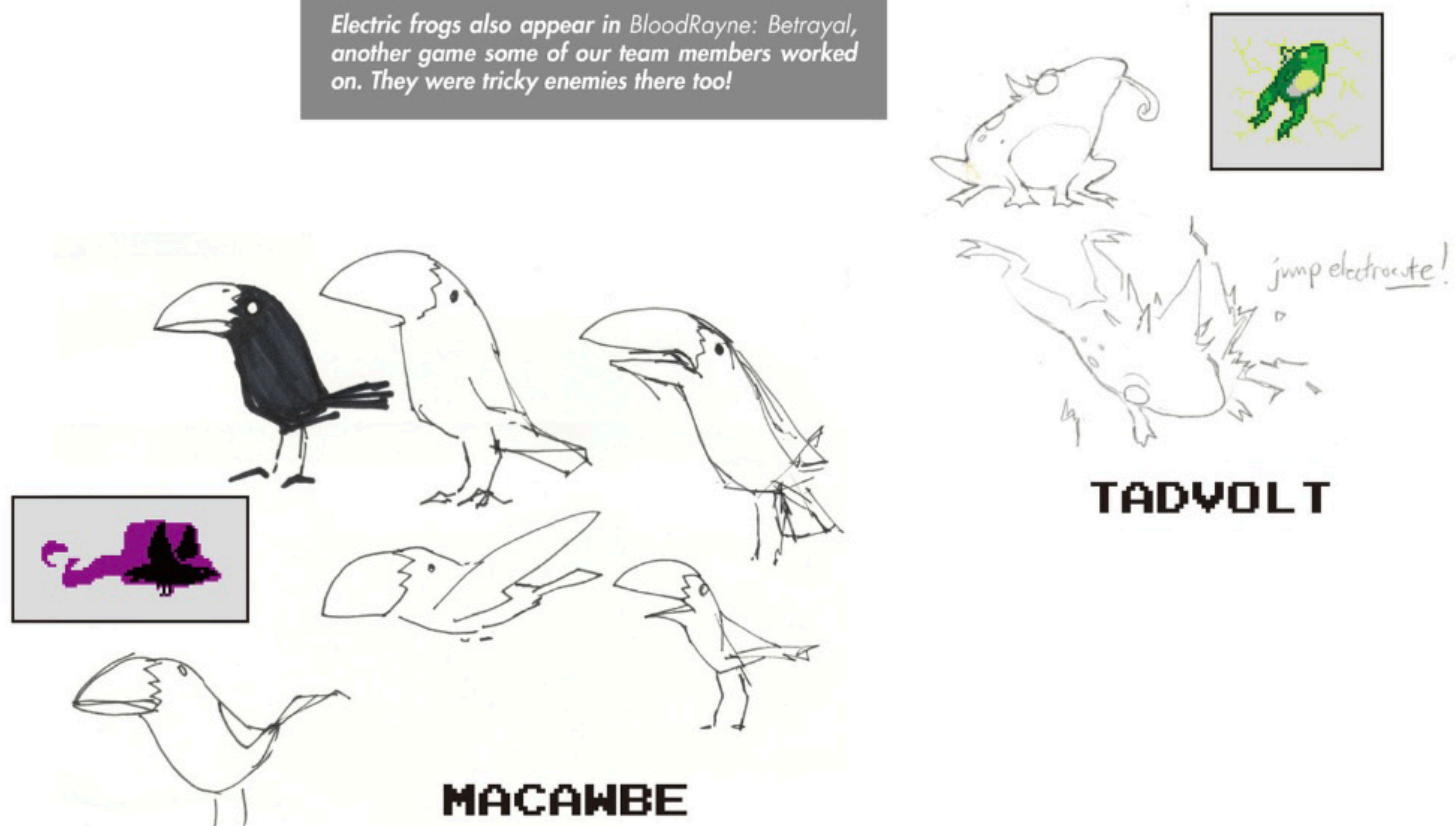


## ENEMIES (CONTINUED)

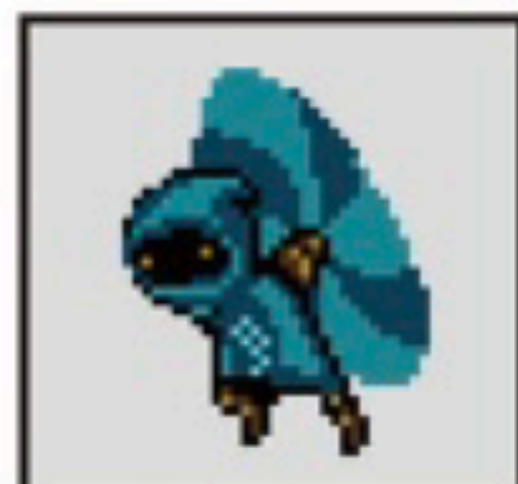


### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Electric frogs also appear in BloodRayne: Betrayal, another game some of our team members worked on. They were tricky enemies there too!







#### DEV. COMMENTARY

The core idea for the Hover Meanie was to create a character that gleefully pushes you around in an infuriating way. I think we succeeded; don't you love this enemy?

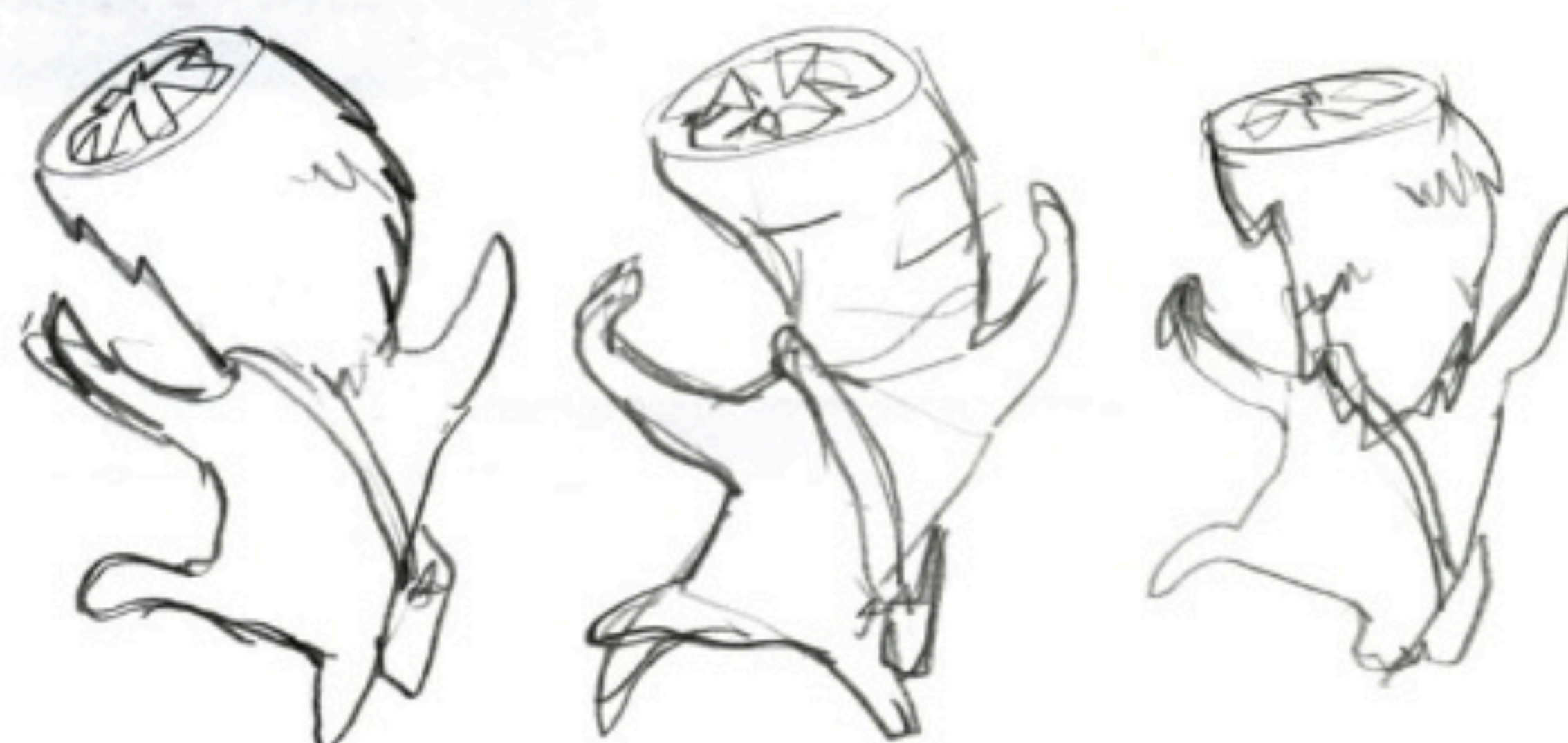
### HOVER MEANIE



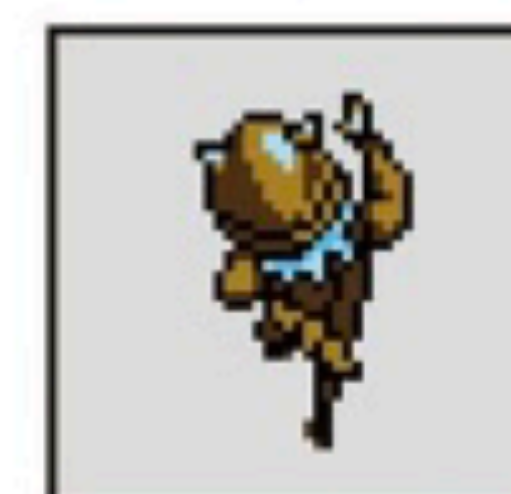
### HOPPICLES

#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

There's been a lot of confusion among fans about what exactly Hoppicles is, so we want to set the record straight: he's a Roman centurion behind a horse-shaped shield! Pretty obvious, isn't it?



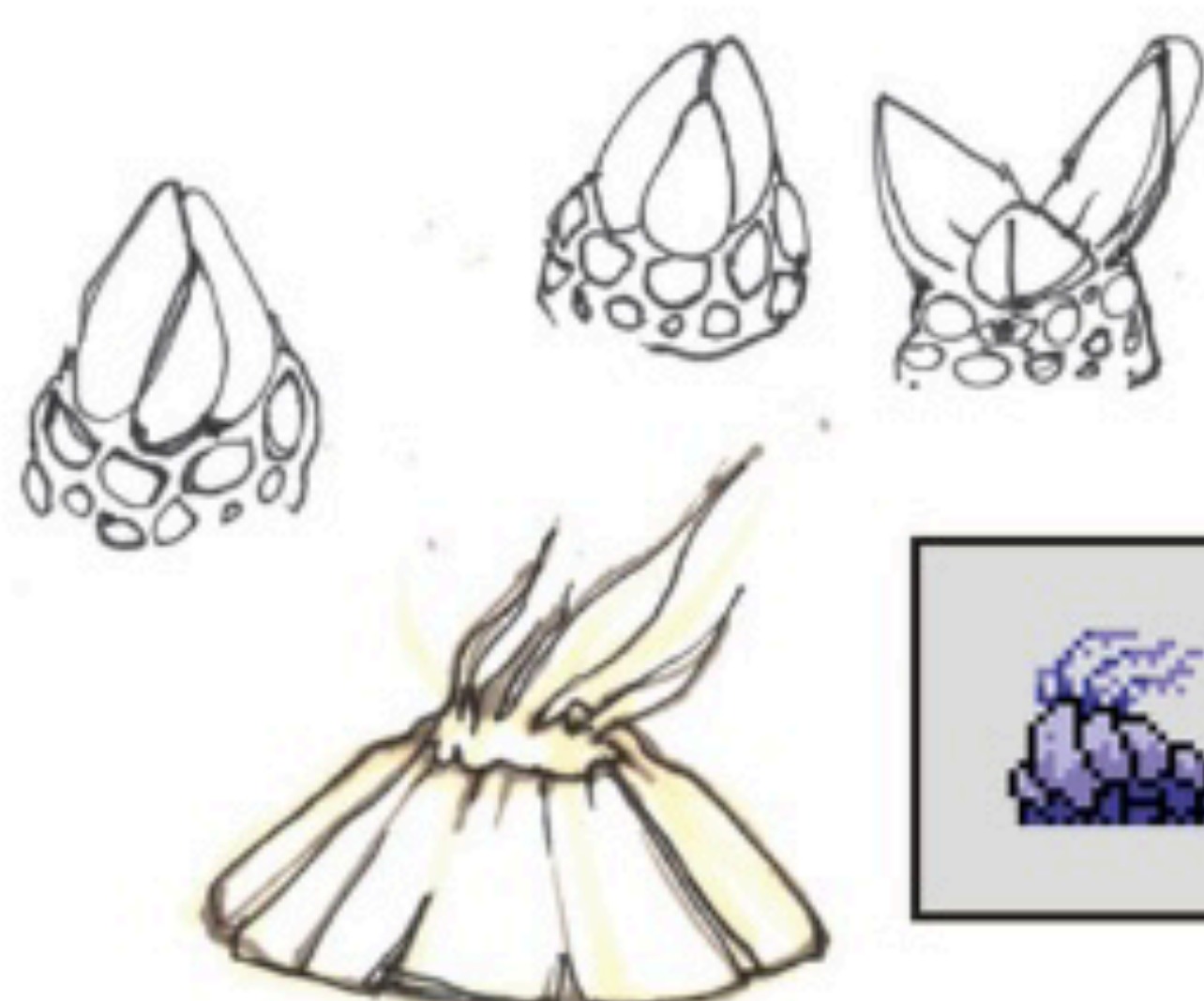
oversized helmet, moves on head as he climbs



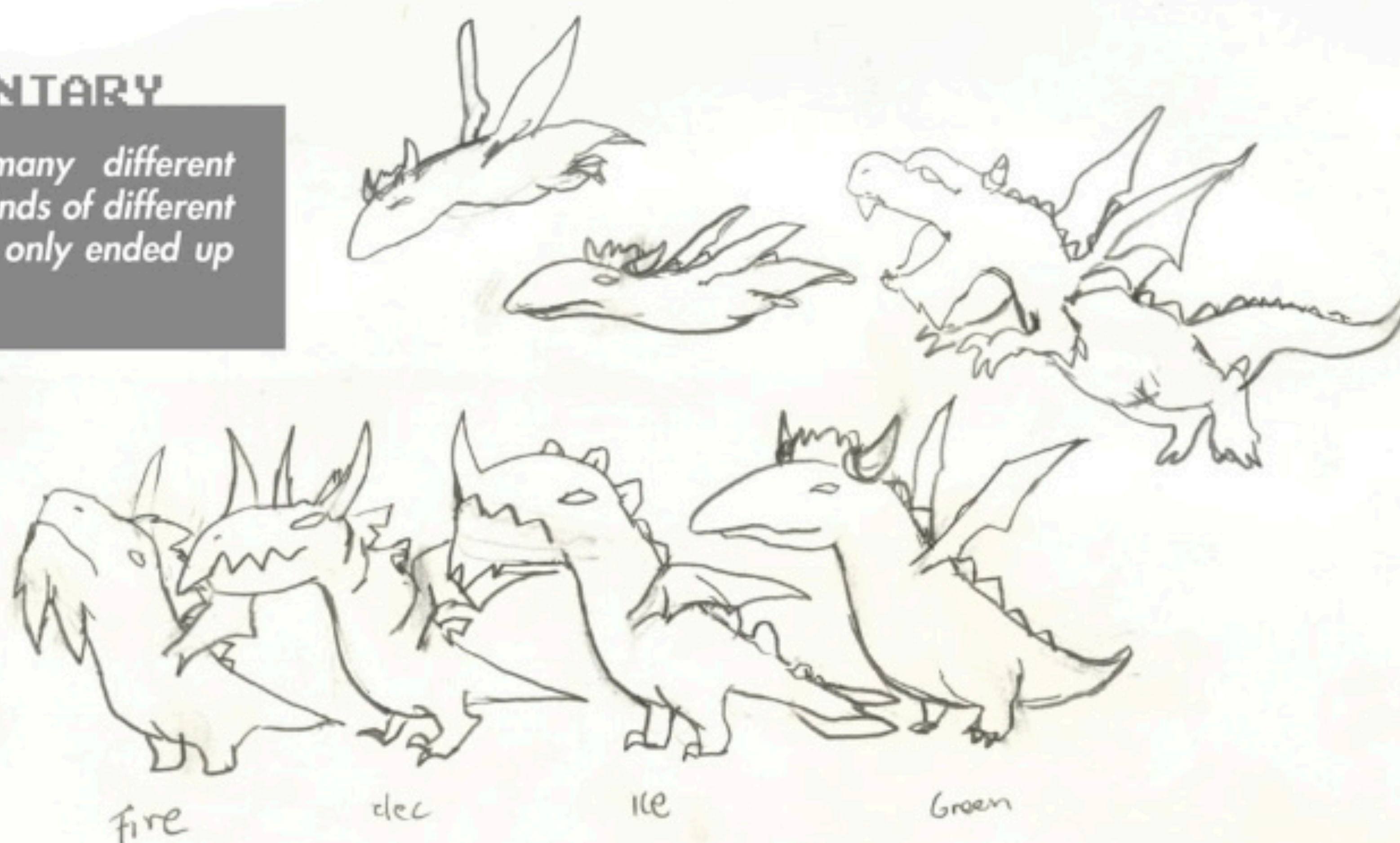
### RUNGSTRIDER

#### DEV. COMMENTARY

We made so many different Drakes with all kinds of different attacks... but we only ended up using these two!



### GOBCANO



### DIVEDRAKE & ICEDRAKE



DIVEDRAKE



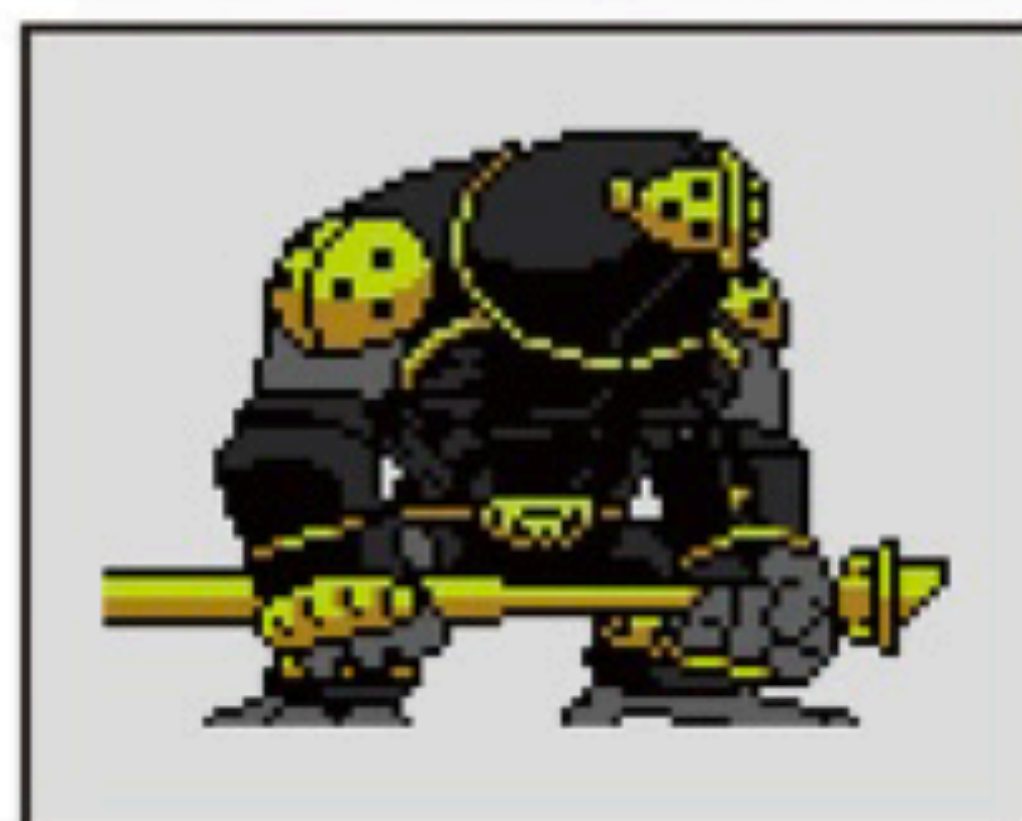
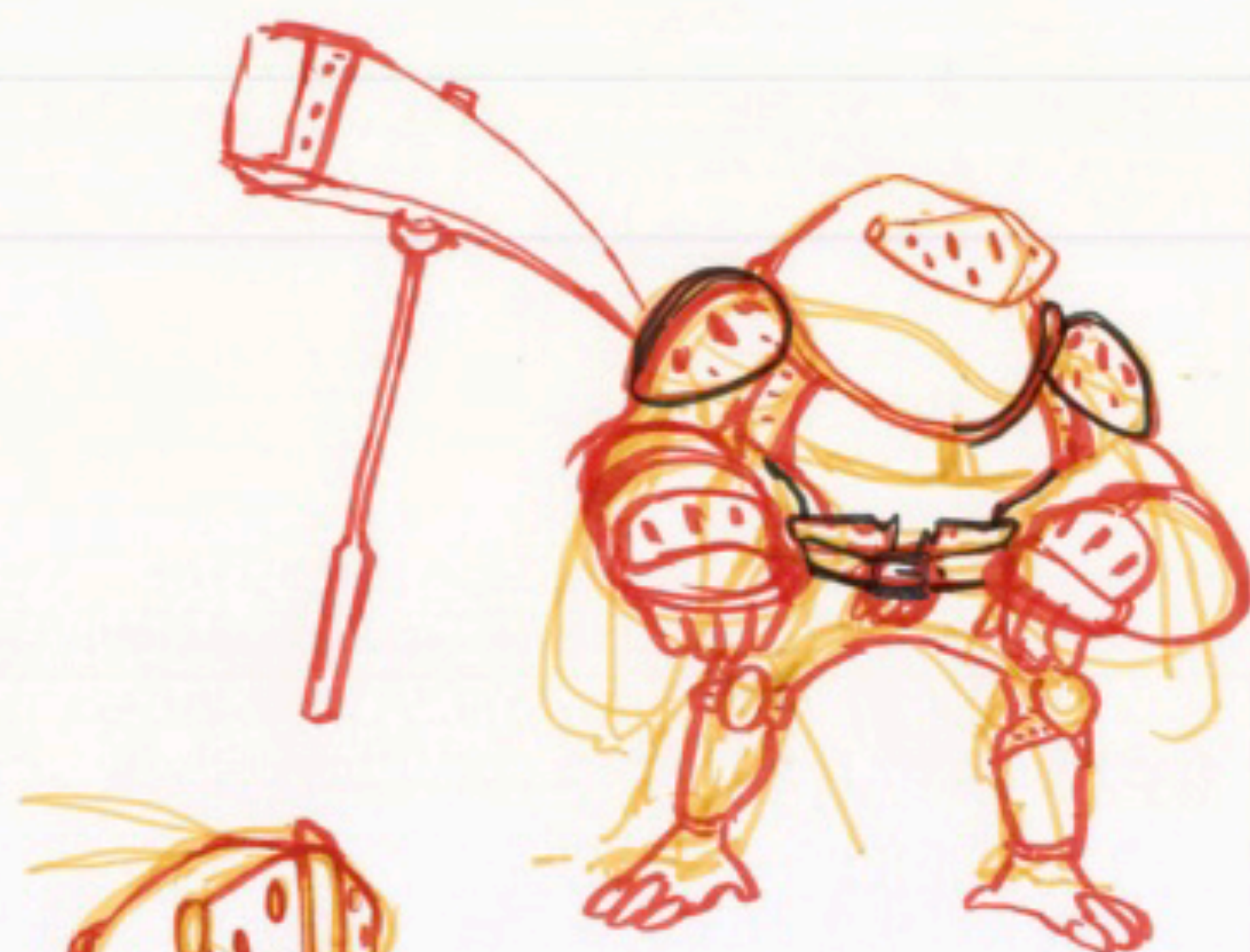
ICEDRAKE



## ENEMIES (CONTINUED)



**FAIRY**

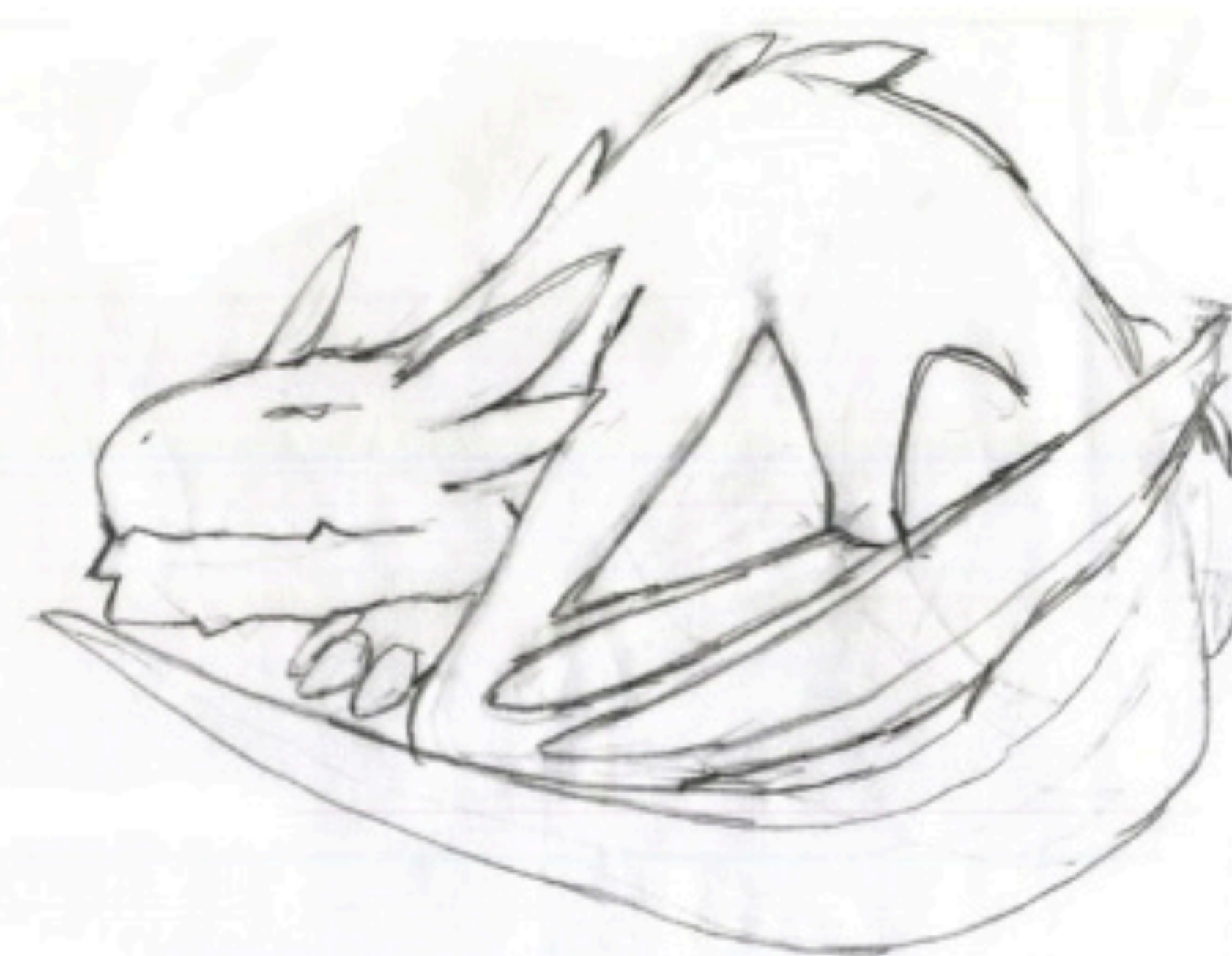


**MOLE MINION**



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

The Dozedrake was added later in the game's development to spice up the opening stage. The goal was to create an impressive but non-threatening mini-boss.



**DOZEDRAKE**

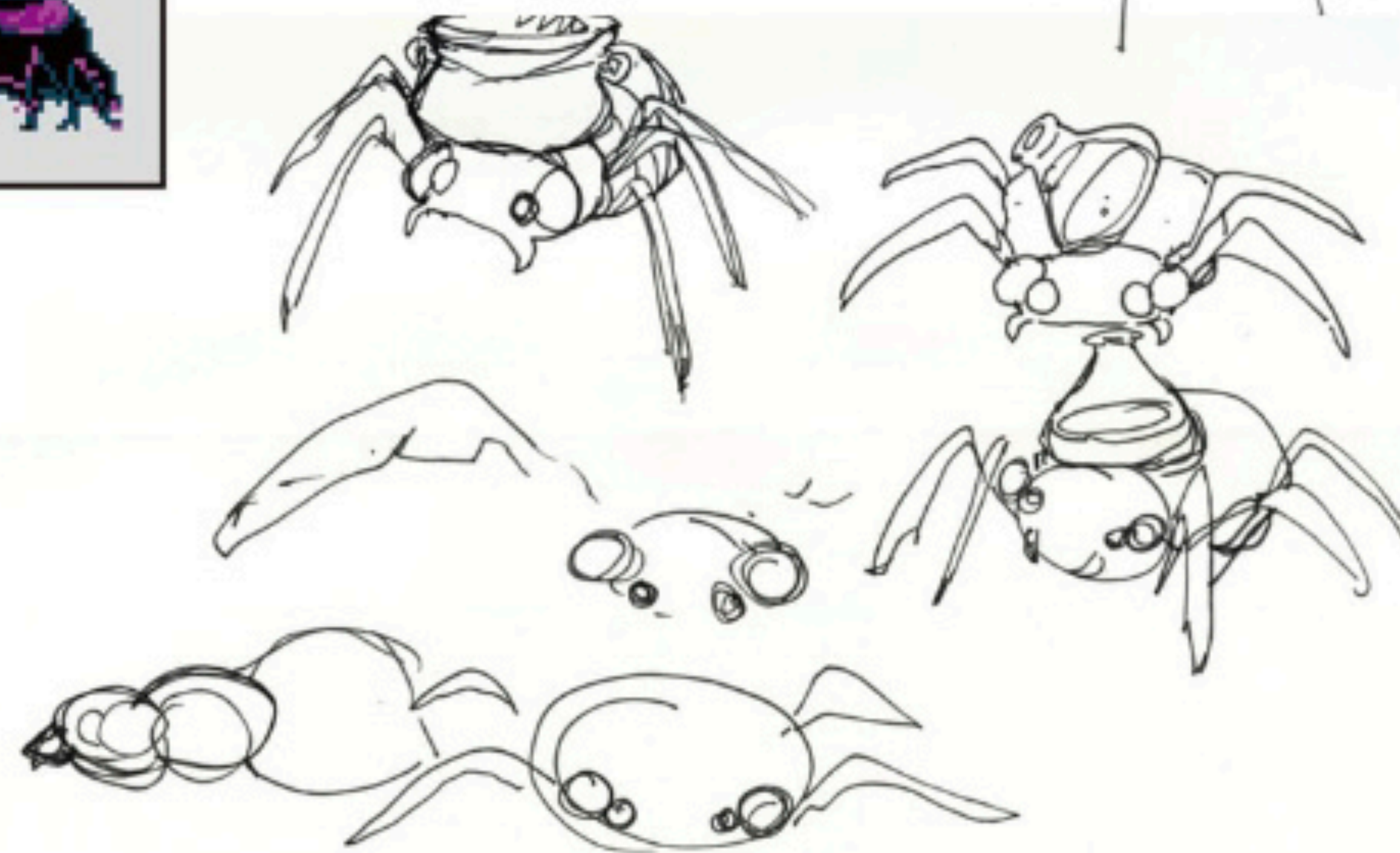
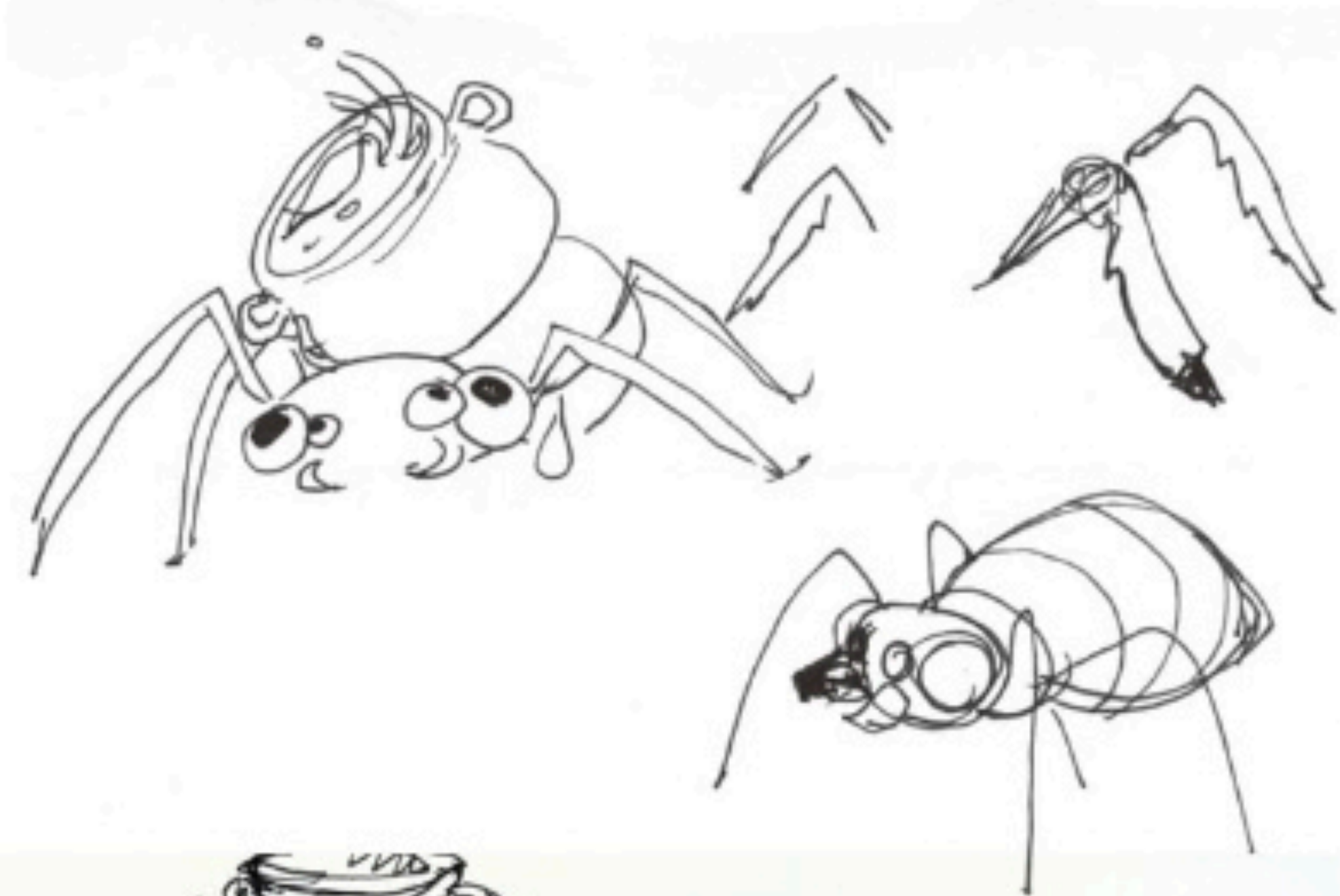




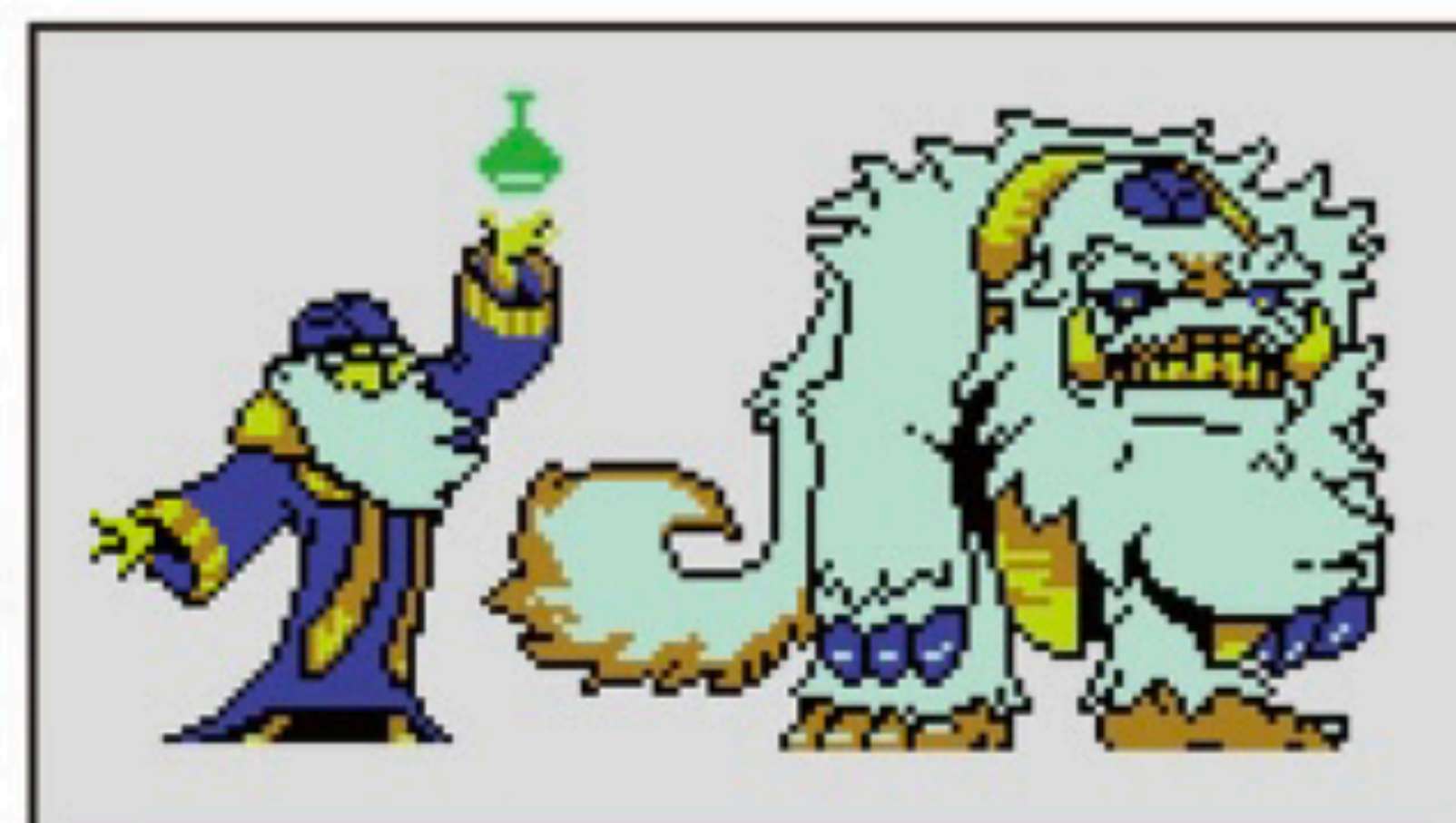


short & furry

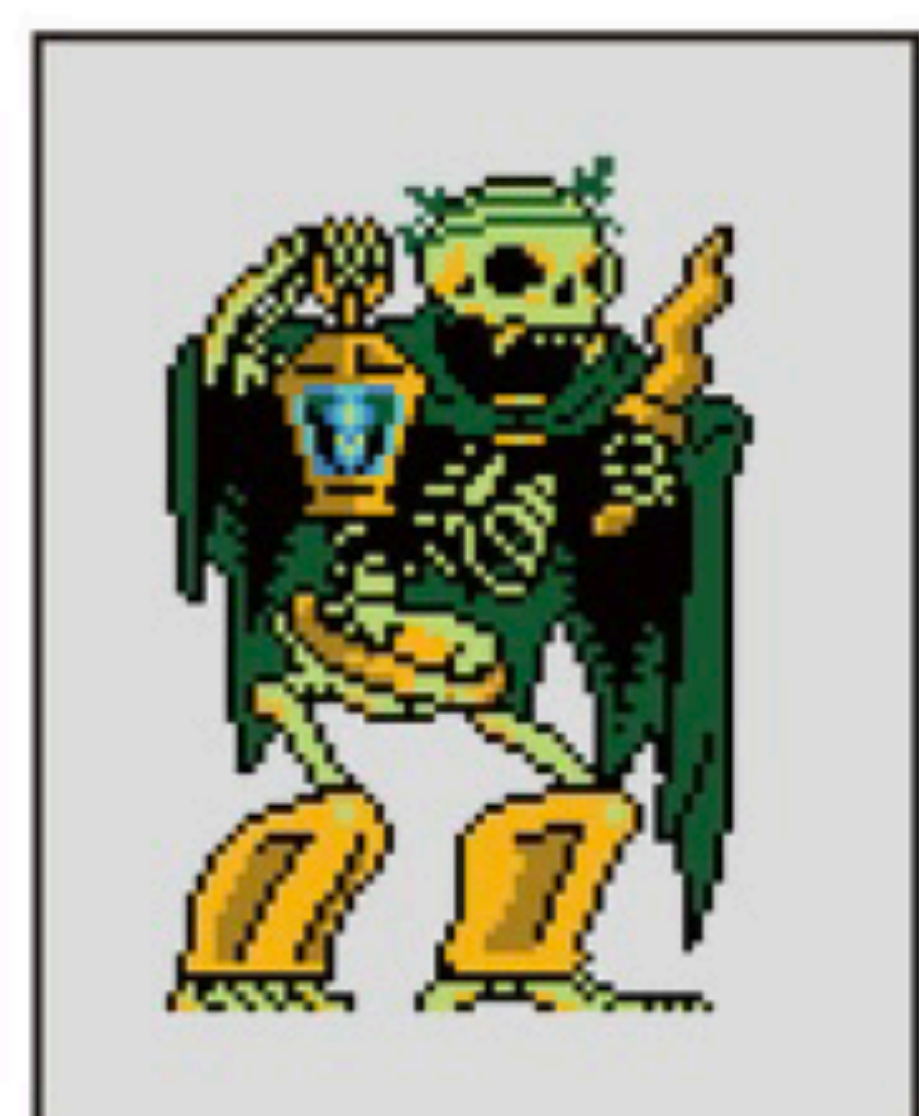
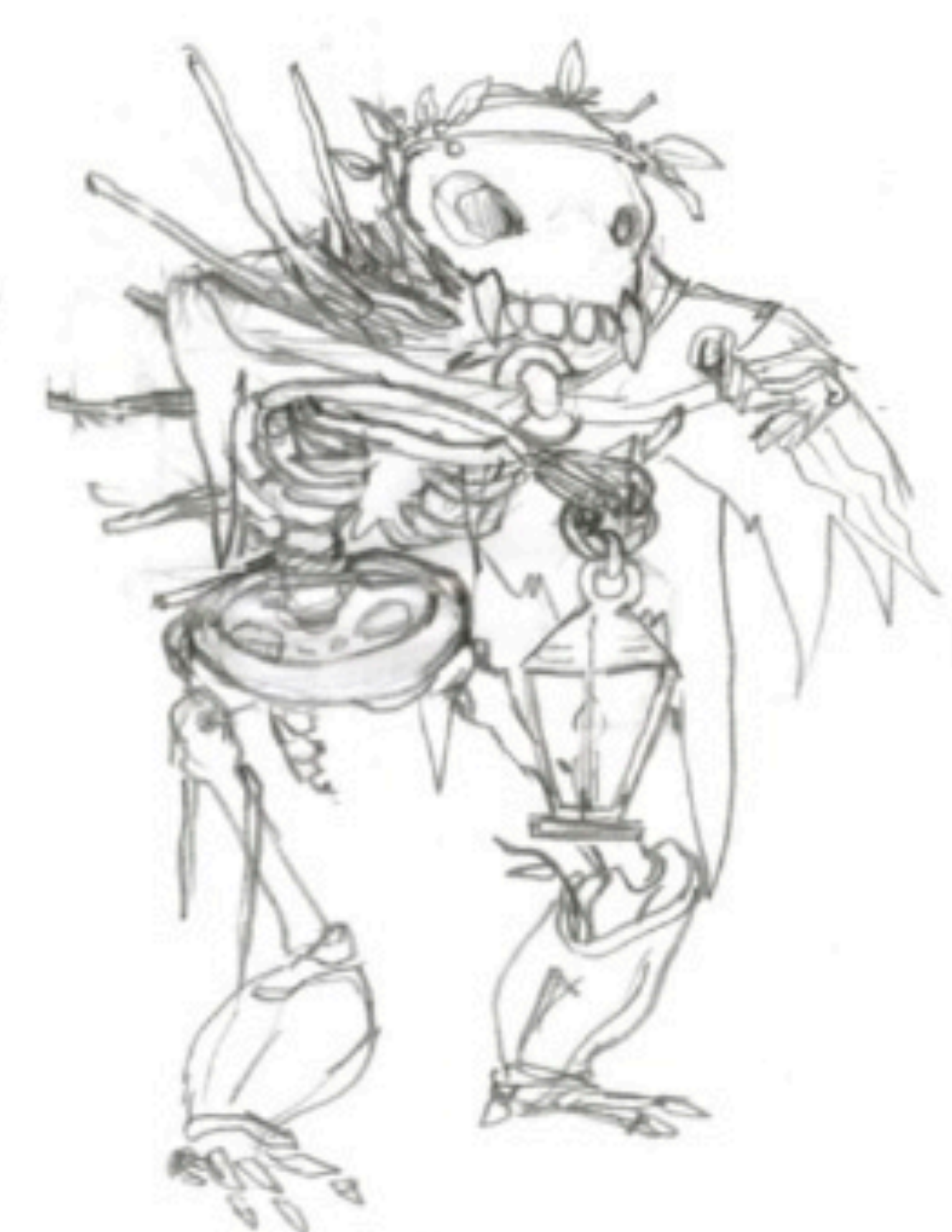
## TUNDREAD



## KETTELEG



## THE ALCHEMEISTER



### DEV. COMMENTARY

The Super Skeleton's design is heavily inspired by The Last Unicorn.

## SUPER SKELETON

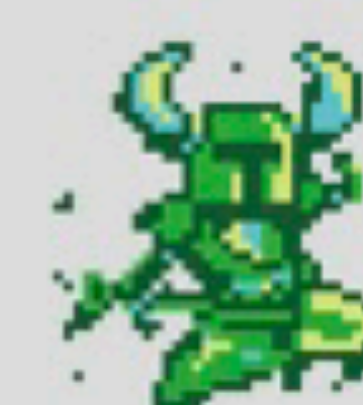
## OTHER ENEMIES



ELECTRODENT



GULPER MAGE



SLIMULACRUM



GRAPPS

### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

The Gulper Mage was a guest design that we received from a friend of ours during Shovel Knight's Kickstarter campaign.



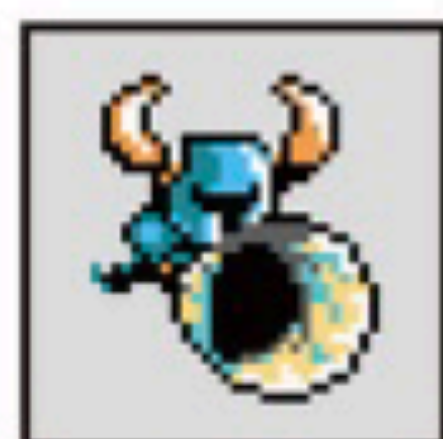
# RELICS, ITEMS, AND OBJECTS

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We focused on making Relics feel like something special to discover. Rather than requiring that you find special weapons in order to proceed and defeat each boss, we instead focused on making Relics something you could miss!



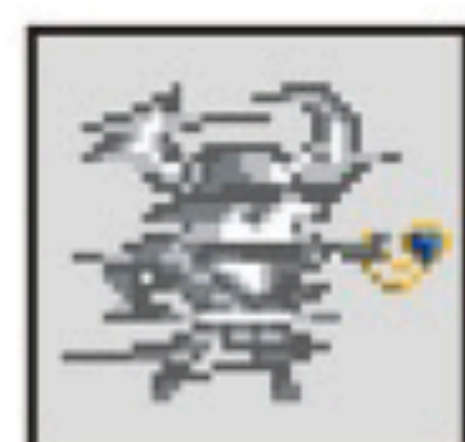
WAR HORN



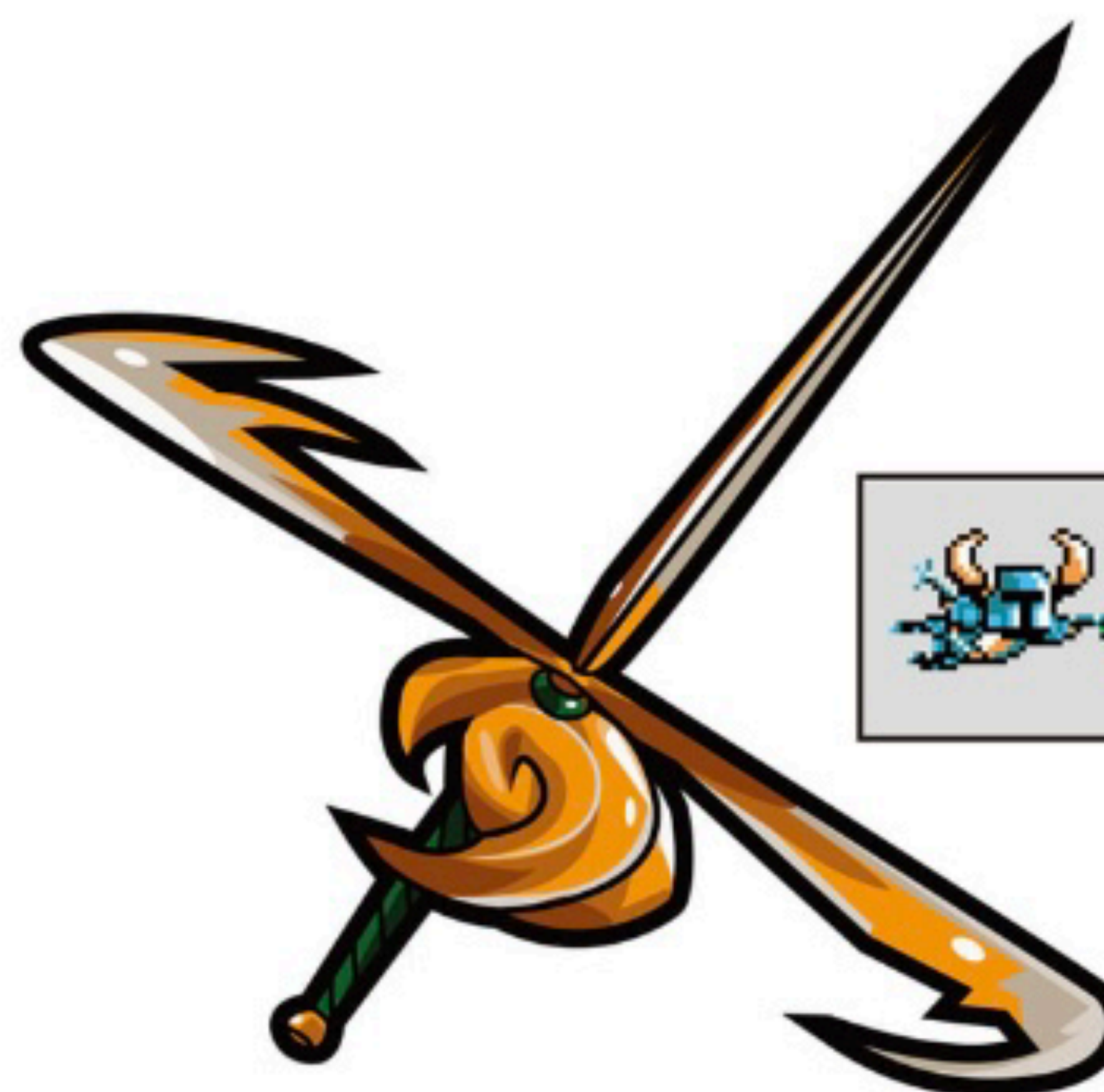
TROUPPLE  
CHALICE



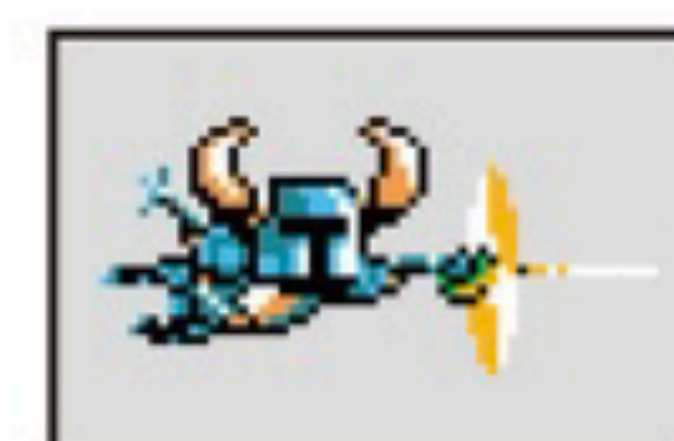
THROWING  
ANCHOR



PHASE  
LOCKET



PROPELLER  
DAGGER



MOBILE  
GEAR



CHAOS  
SPHERE







FISHING  
ROD

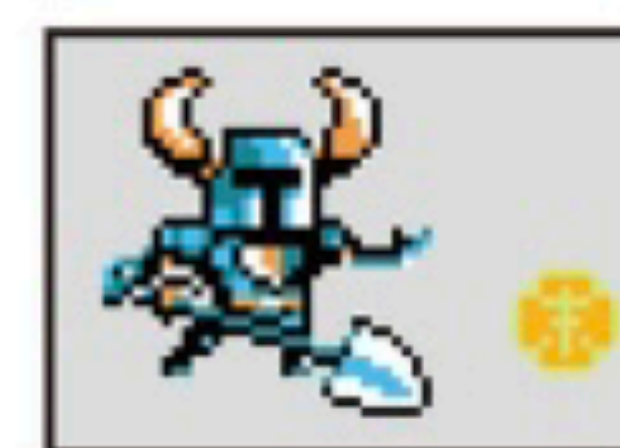


#### DEV. COMMENTARY

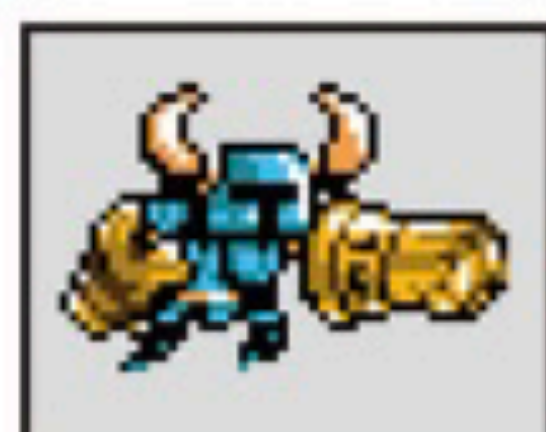
A Fishing Rod was pitched because it would be funny to see an armored knight sitting down to fish, but we were worried it would slow down the action too much. We put it on hold until we had more ideas about how it could be useful (like fishing up Trouples and recovering gold). For a short time, it was the most powerful weapon!



ALCHEMY  
COIN



DUST  
KNUCKLES



#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

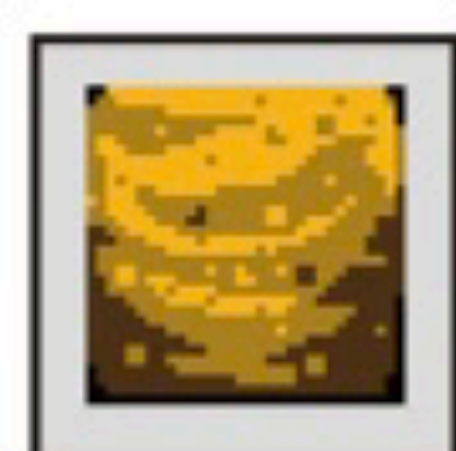
The Dust Knuckles were originally Mole Claws, like Mole Knight's! Out of all the Relics, this one went through the most gameplay iterations. It's difficult to accentuate a close-range special attack because the player is already afraid of being up close to an enemy. Also, Shovel Knight is already really good at digging!



BOMB



TURKEY



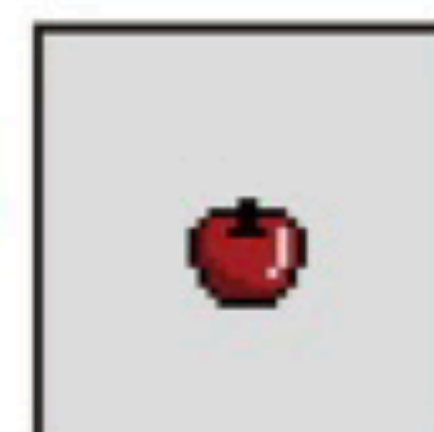
DIRT  
BLOCK



CARROT



APPLE

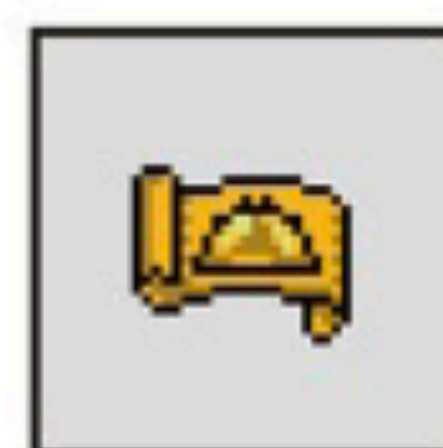




## RELICS, ITEMS, AND OBJECTS (CONTINUED)



SONG  
SCROLL



MEAL  
TICKET

### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

The player has many choices in terms of how to spend gold. However, at key points in the game we wanted to encourage players to upgrade their health first and foremost as well as remind them to visit the village again. So we created the Meal Ticket, a free voucher that basically said "Hey! Go back to the village and upgrade your health!"



LOOT

### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Originally, dropped money bags simply fell to the ground and would only fly around with wings if you fell into a pit. But this resulted in too much lost gold, and we concluded that all money bags should fly!



FLYING LOOT

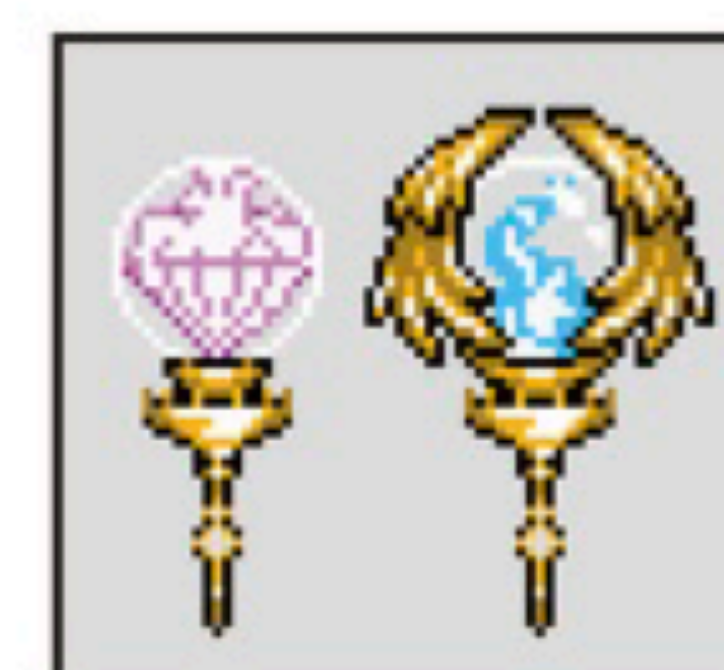


### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We were constantly concerned about players losing all of their money and feeling stuck. We partially addressed this concern with the Song Scrolls, which serve as a way to effectively bank gold for use later. They're similar to the crushable souls mechanic found in *Dark Souls*.



CHECKPOINT



### DEV. COMMENTARY

We were looking for a way to visually convey the value of a checkpoint, so we used a clear glass globe, which displays more valuable treasure within.



TROUT







## CHAPTER 3

# ROUGH SKETCHES AND EARLY CONCEPTS

If you're seeking the definitive behind-the-scenes look at the development of *Shovel Knight*, you've come to the right chapter! Bear witness to *Shovel Knight*'s complete transformation from a fledgling Kickstarter campaign into a million-selling hit video game as you pore over the earliest concept illustrations of everything from main characters and enemies to stages, environments, logos, cutscenes, and more. You may even find entirely unused concepts as well as some especially bizarre rough illustrations that we couldn't fit in anywhere else!



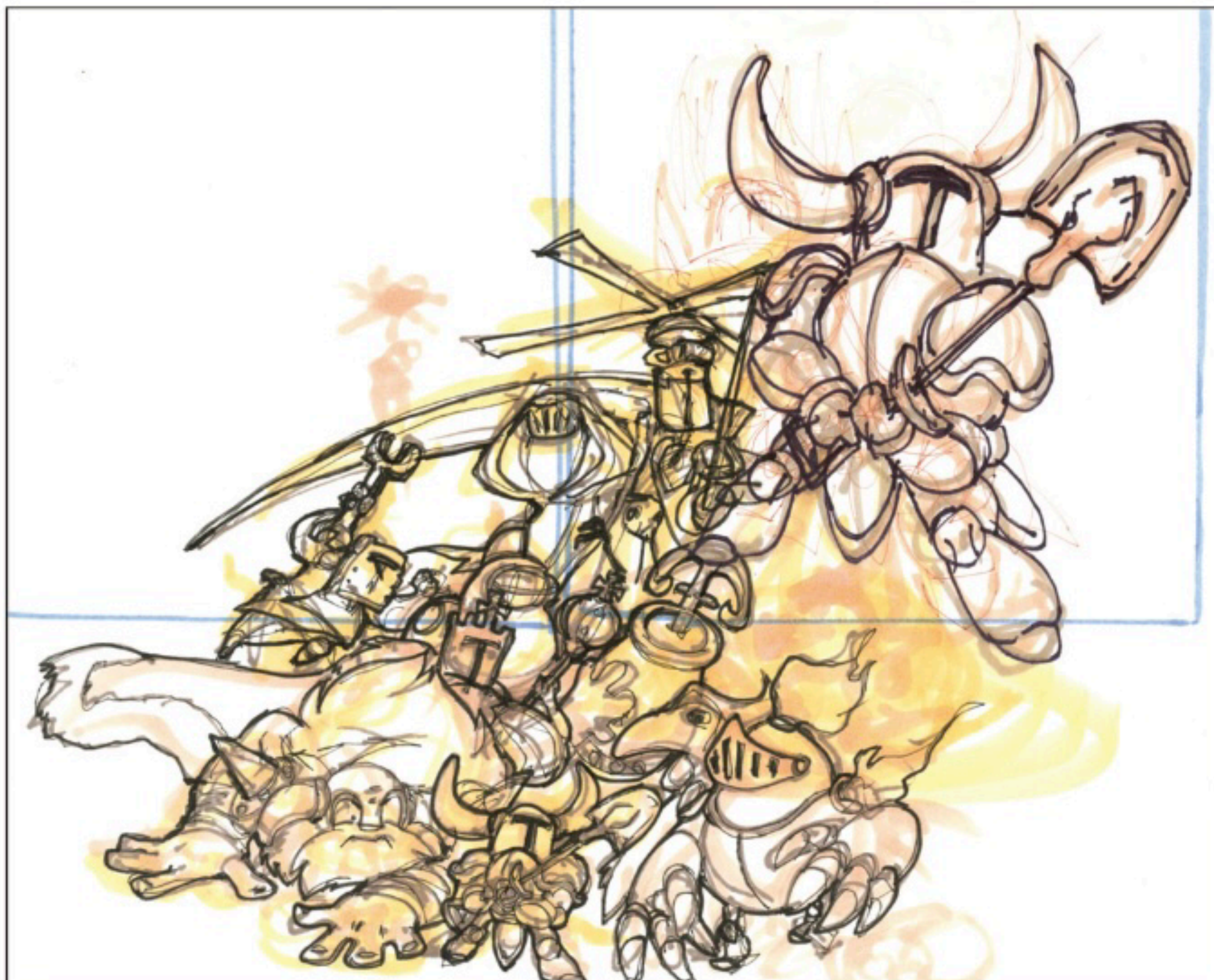
# ROUGH SKETCHES AND EARLY CONCEPTS

## MAIN CHARACTERS

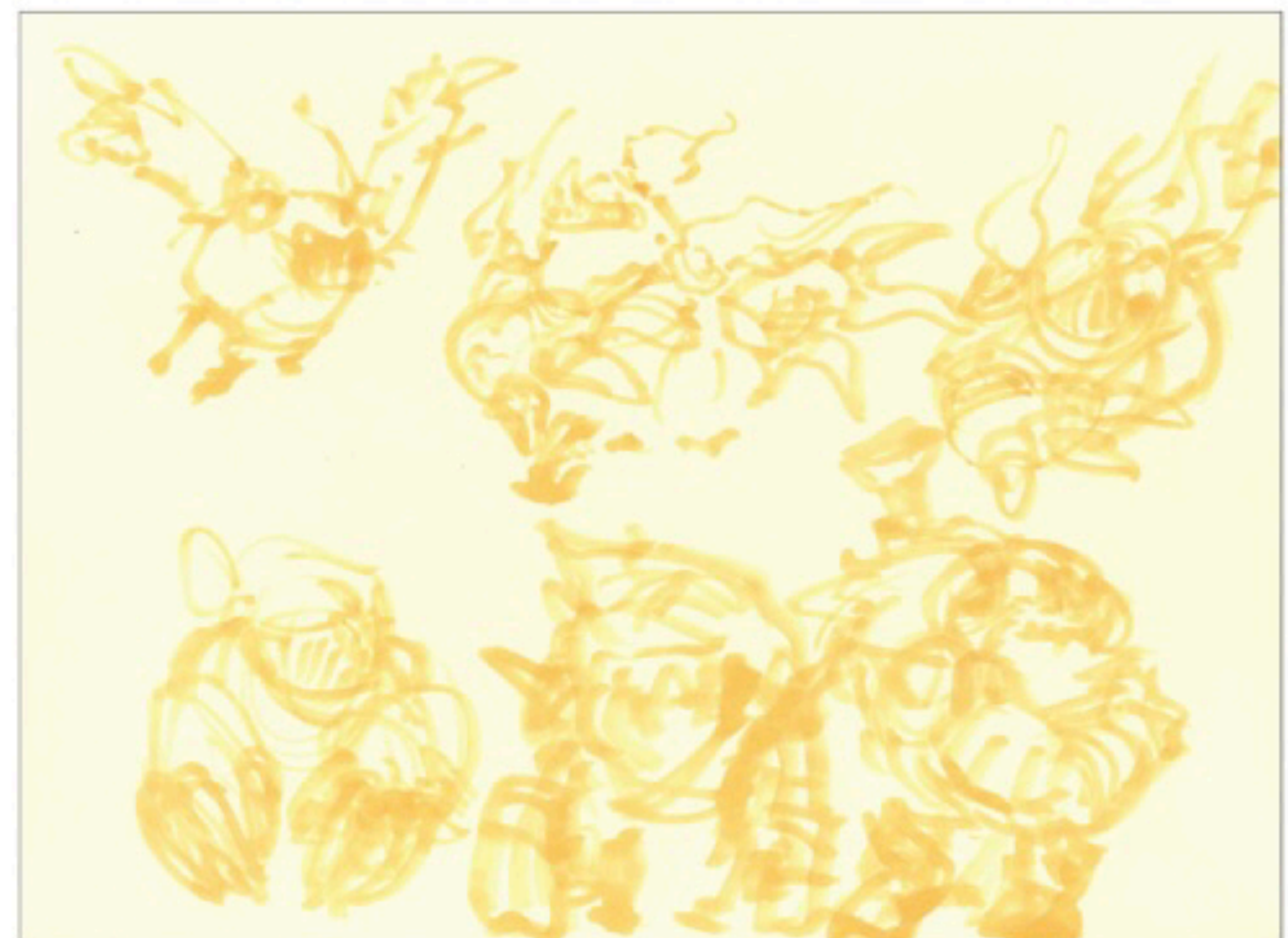
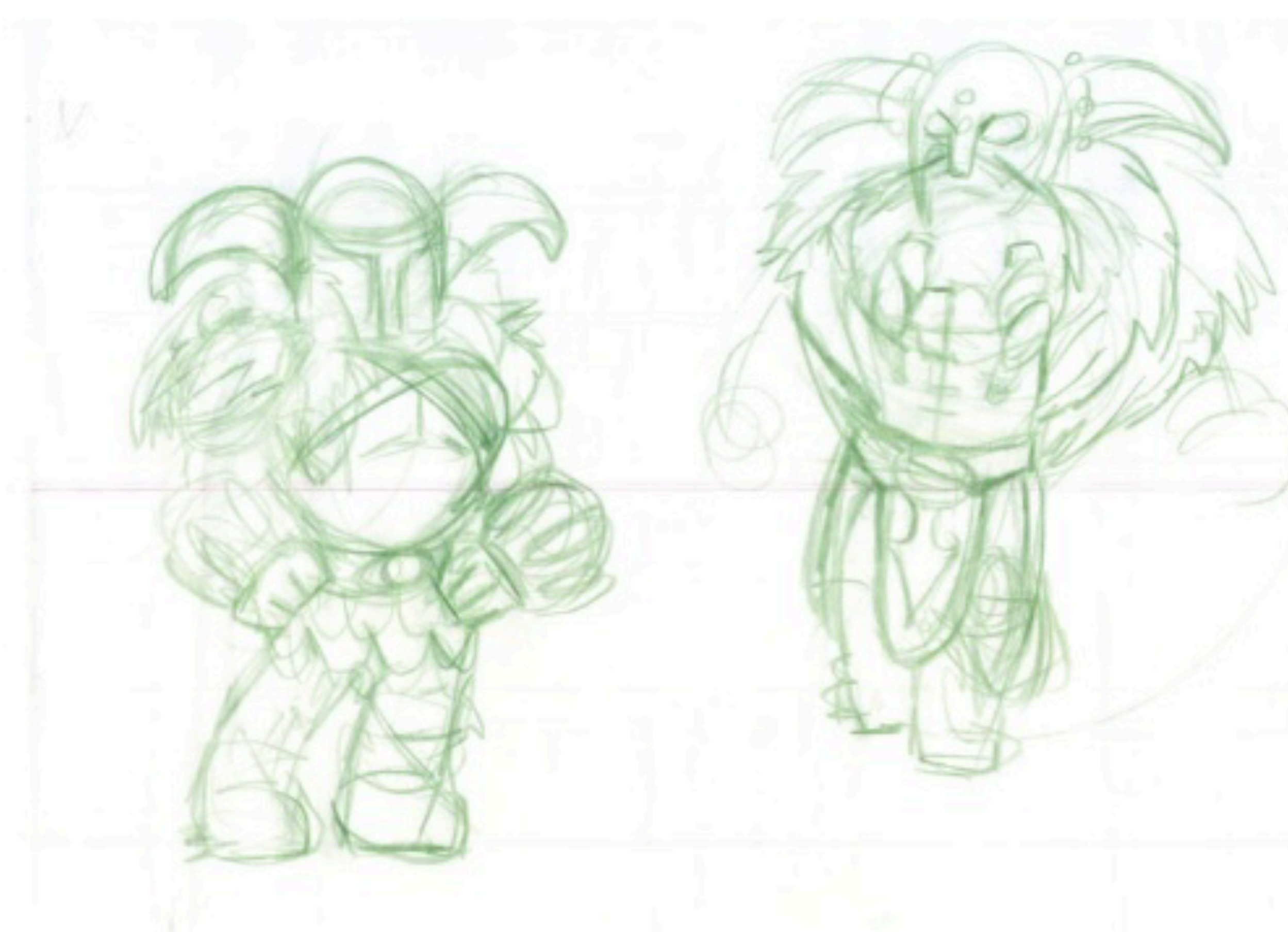
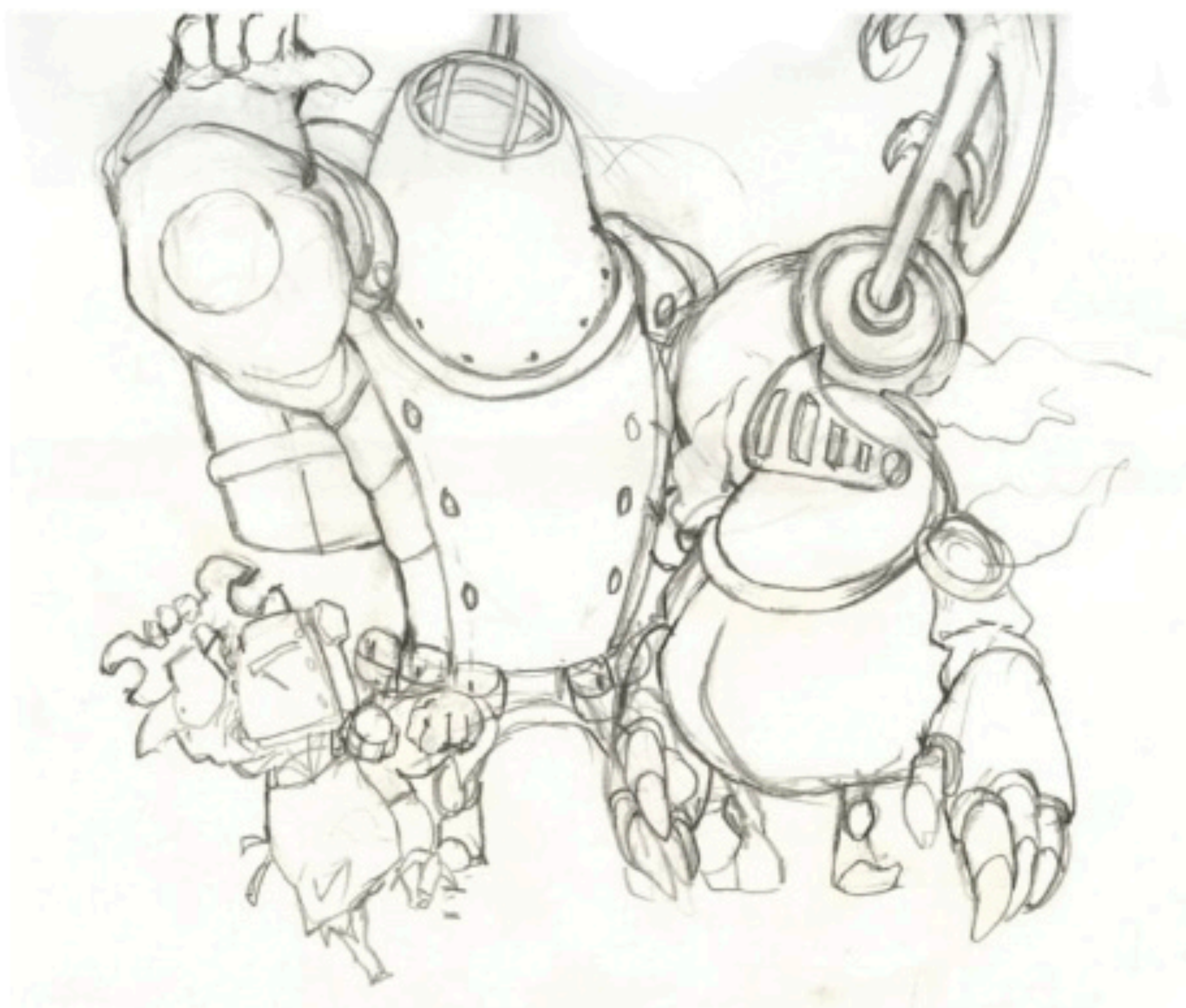
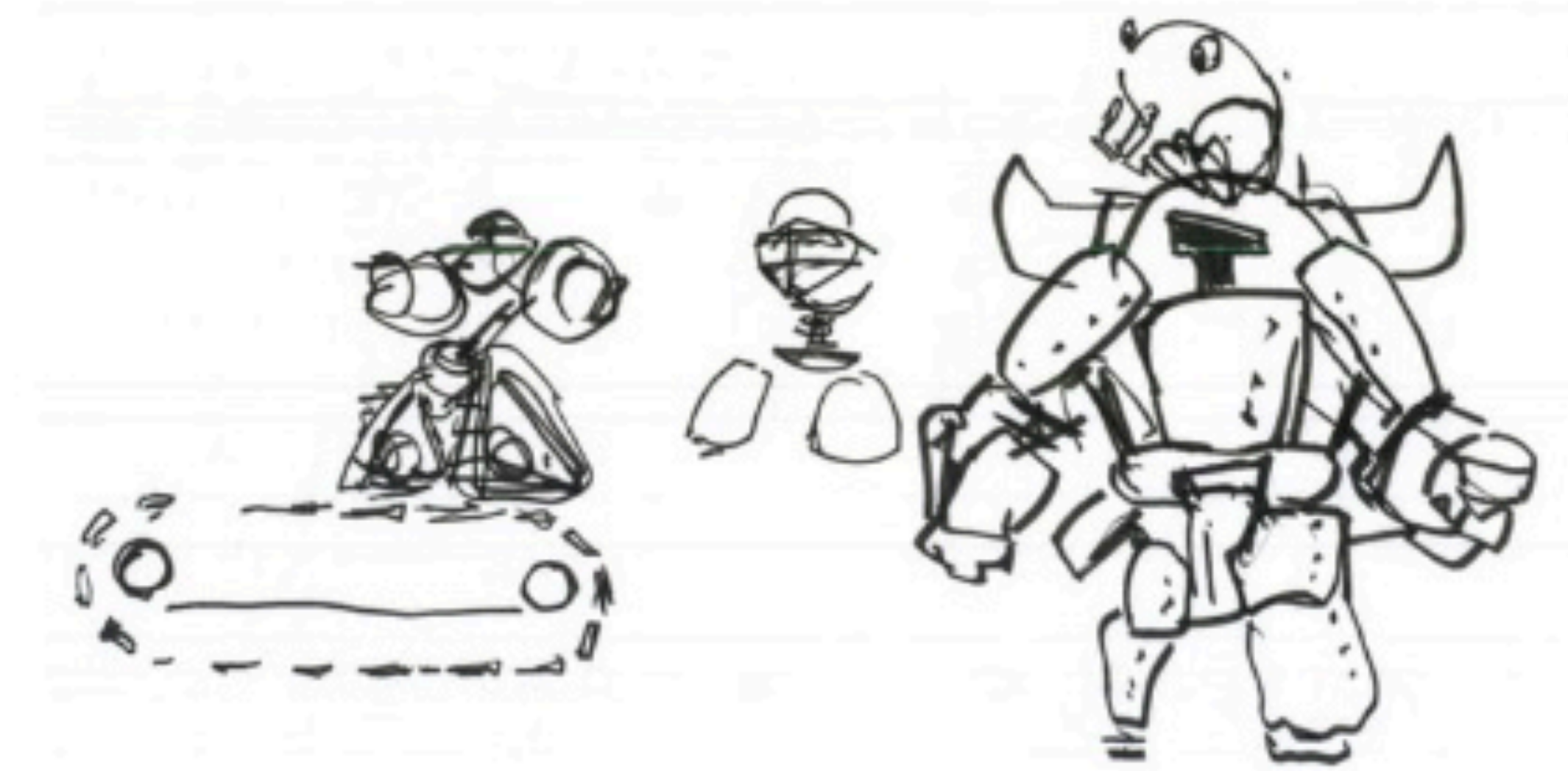
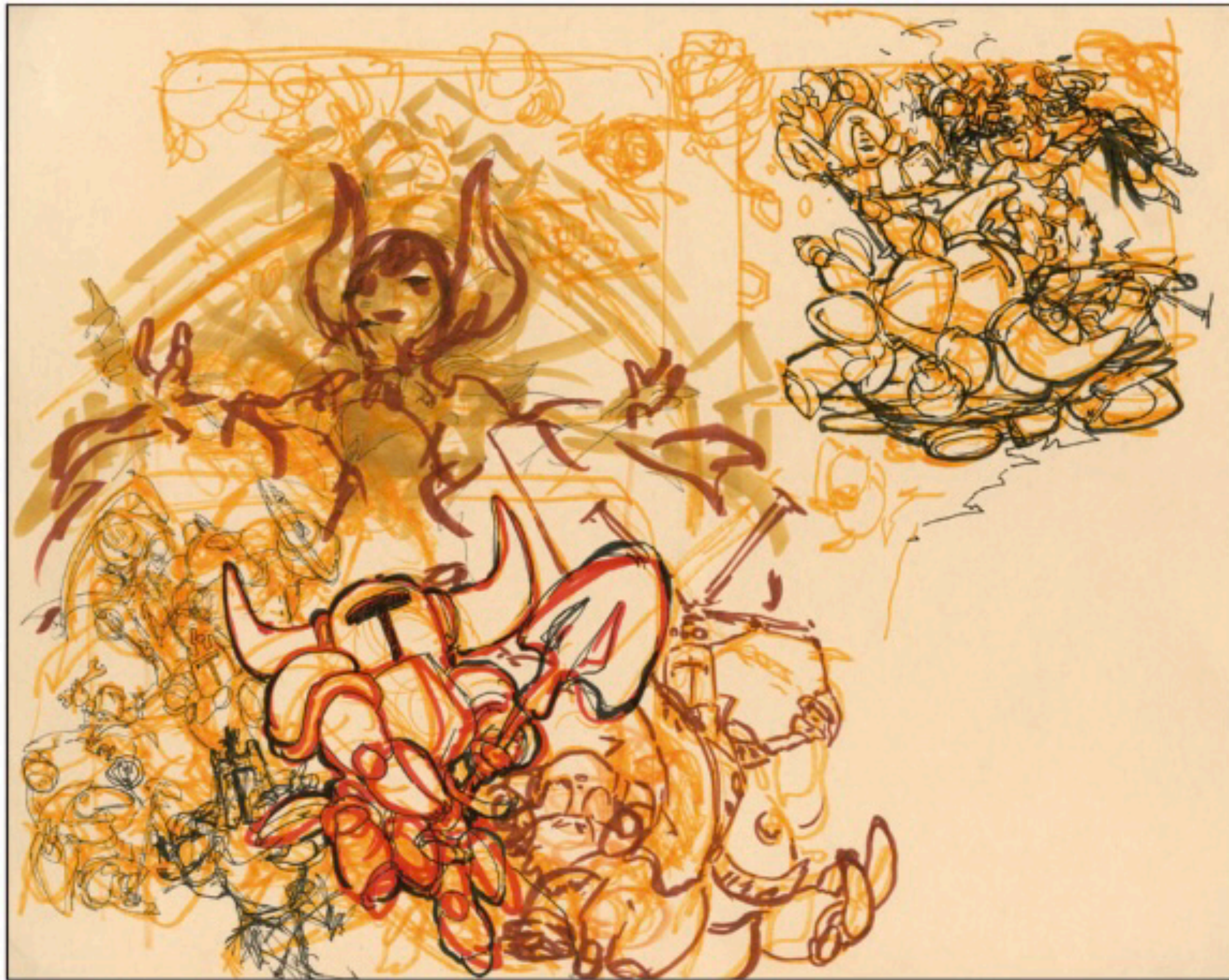


### DEV. COMMENTARY

Many of these concepts are for potential box art designs. They feature the villain - the Enchantress, in this case - looming over the entire cast, much like a lot of classic video game box artwork.

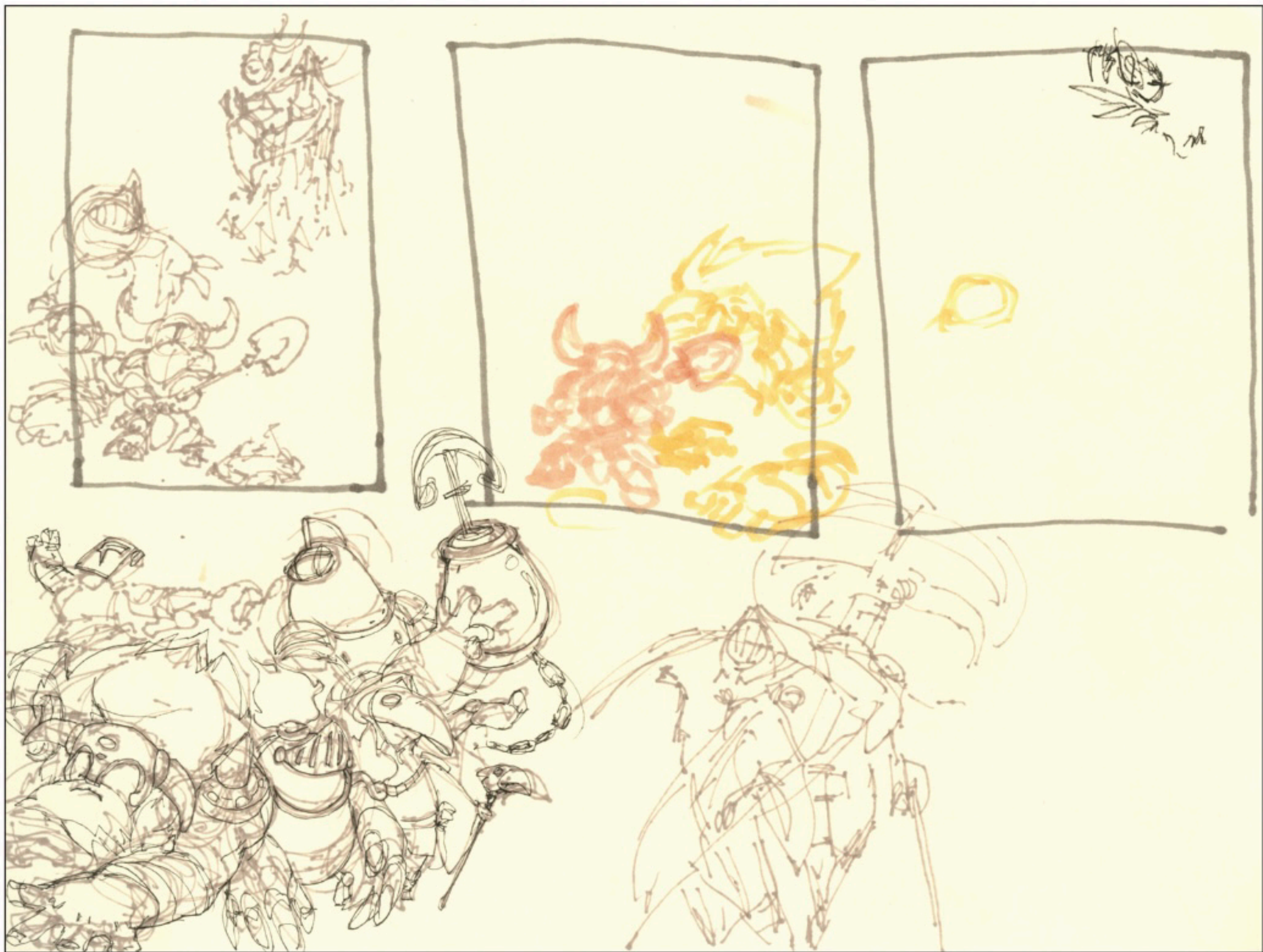






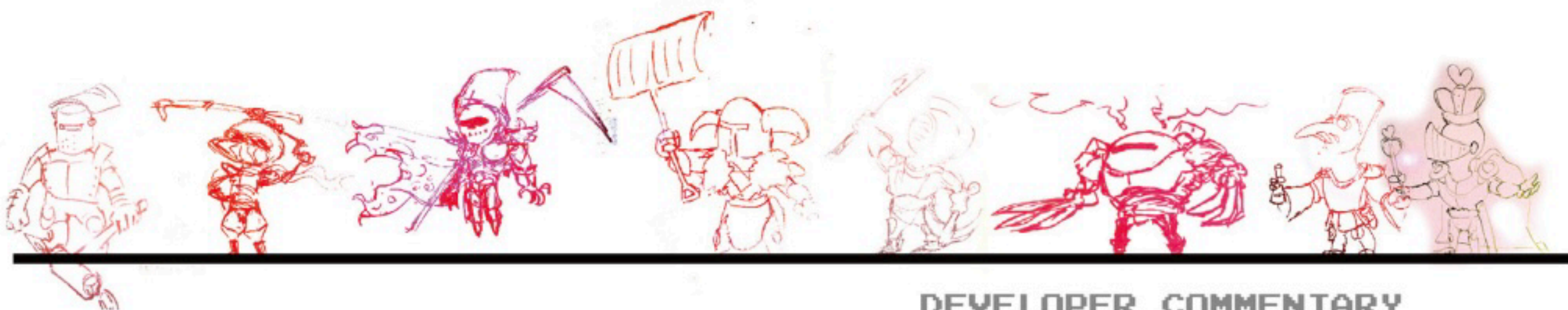
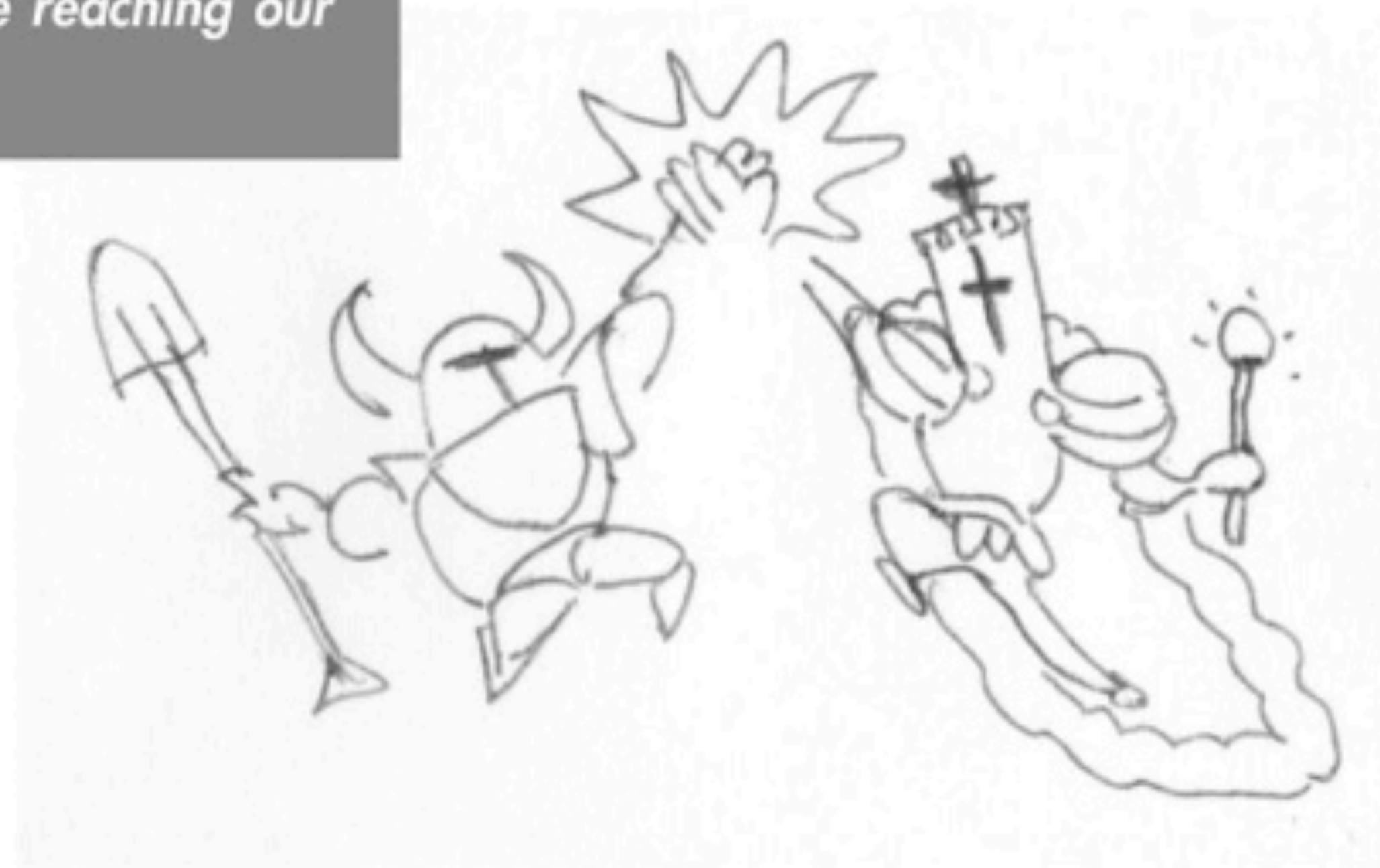


## MAIN CHARACTERS (CONTINUED)



### DEV. COMMENTARY

*This jubilant high five was quickly drawn to celebrate reaching our Kickstarter goal!*



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

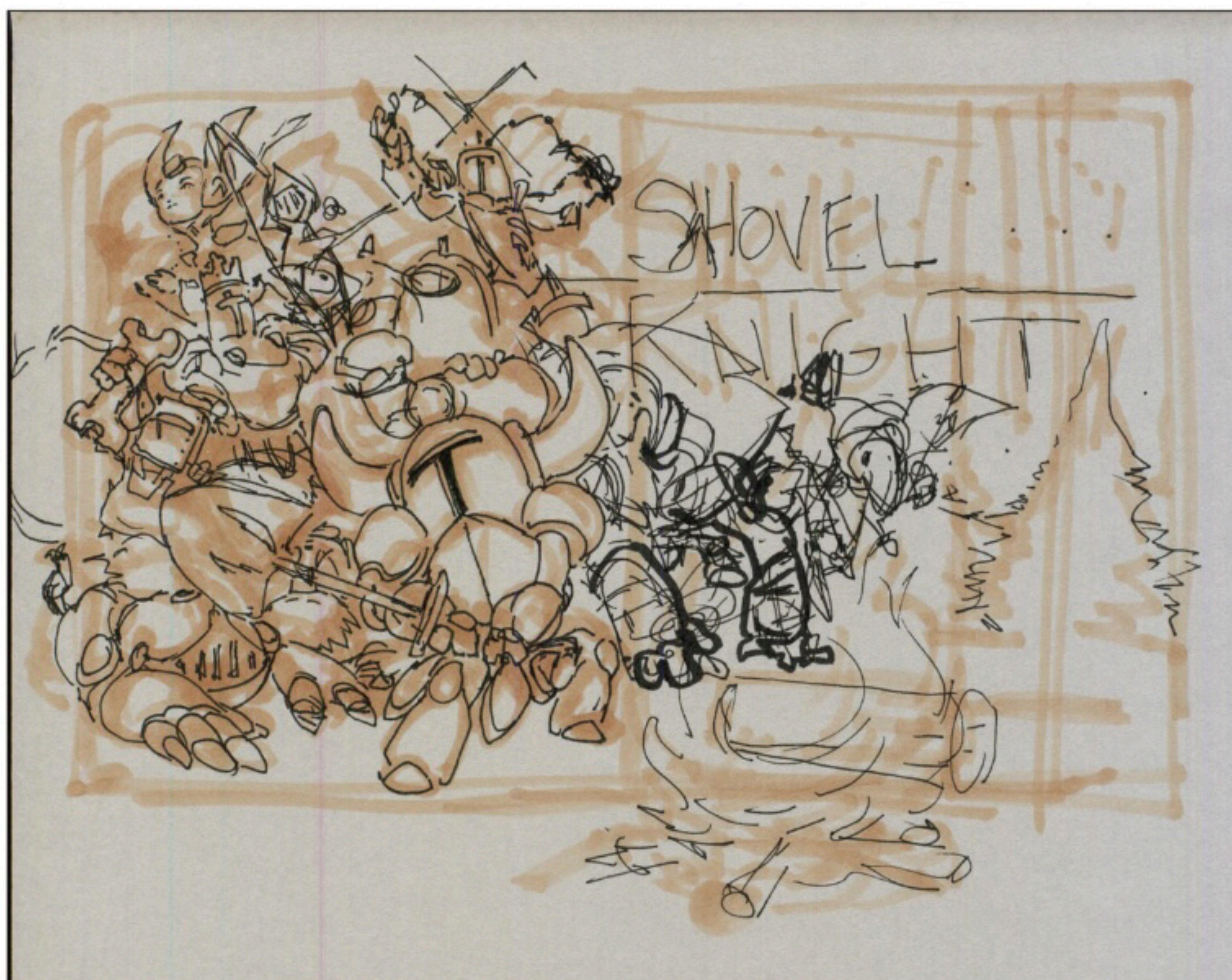
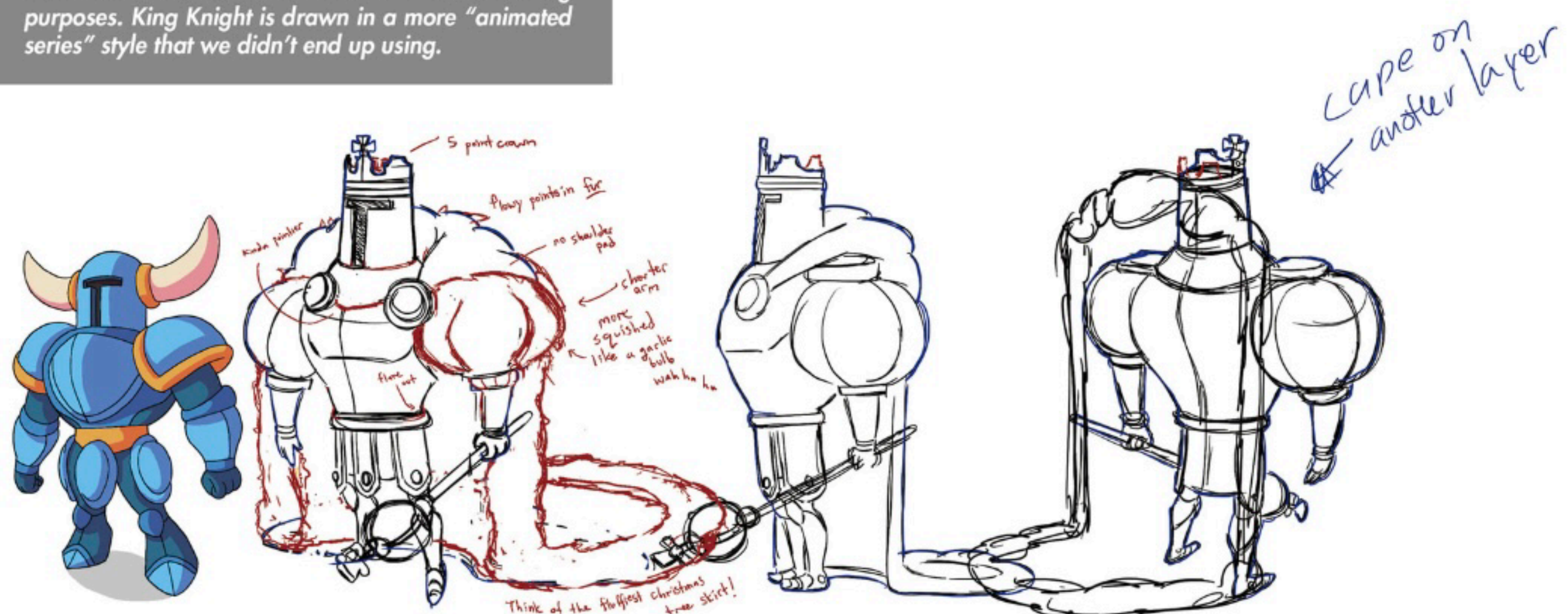
*This was the first-ever lineup of The Order of No Quarter! They look rough because they were drawn in ten minutes on a whiteboard.*





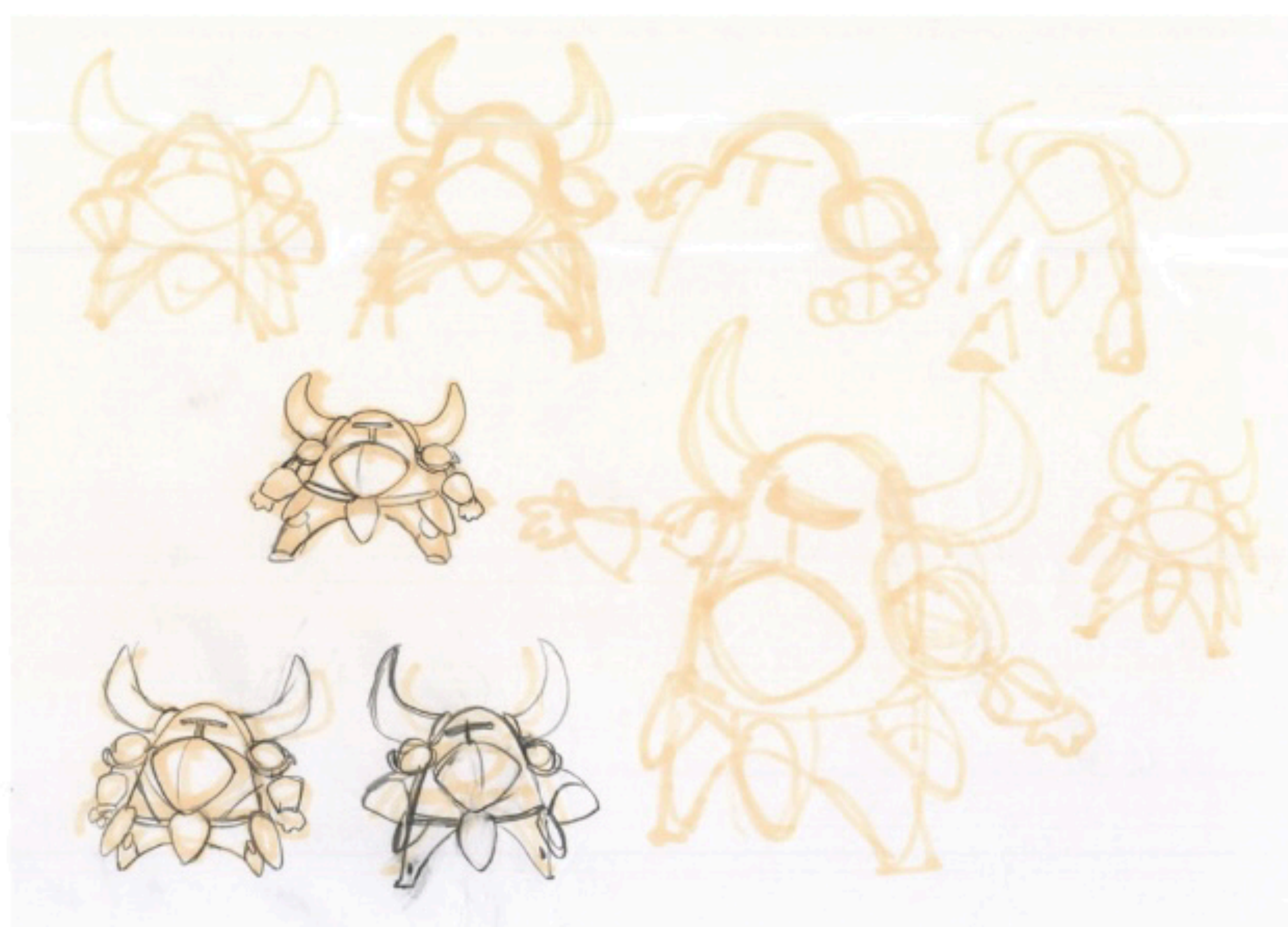
## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Turnarounds like this were made for merchandising purposes. King Knight is drawn in a more "animated series" style that we didn't end up using.





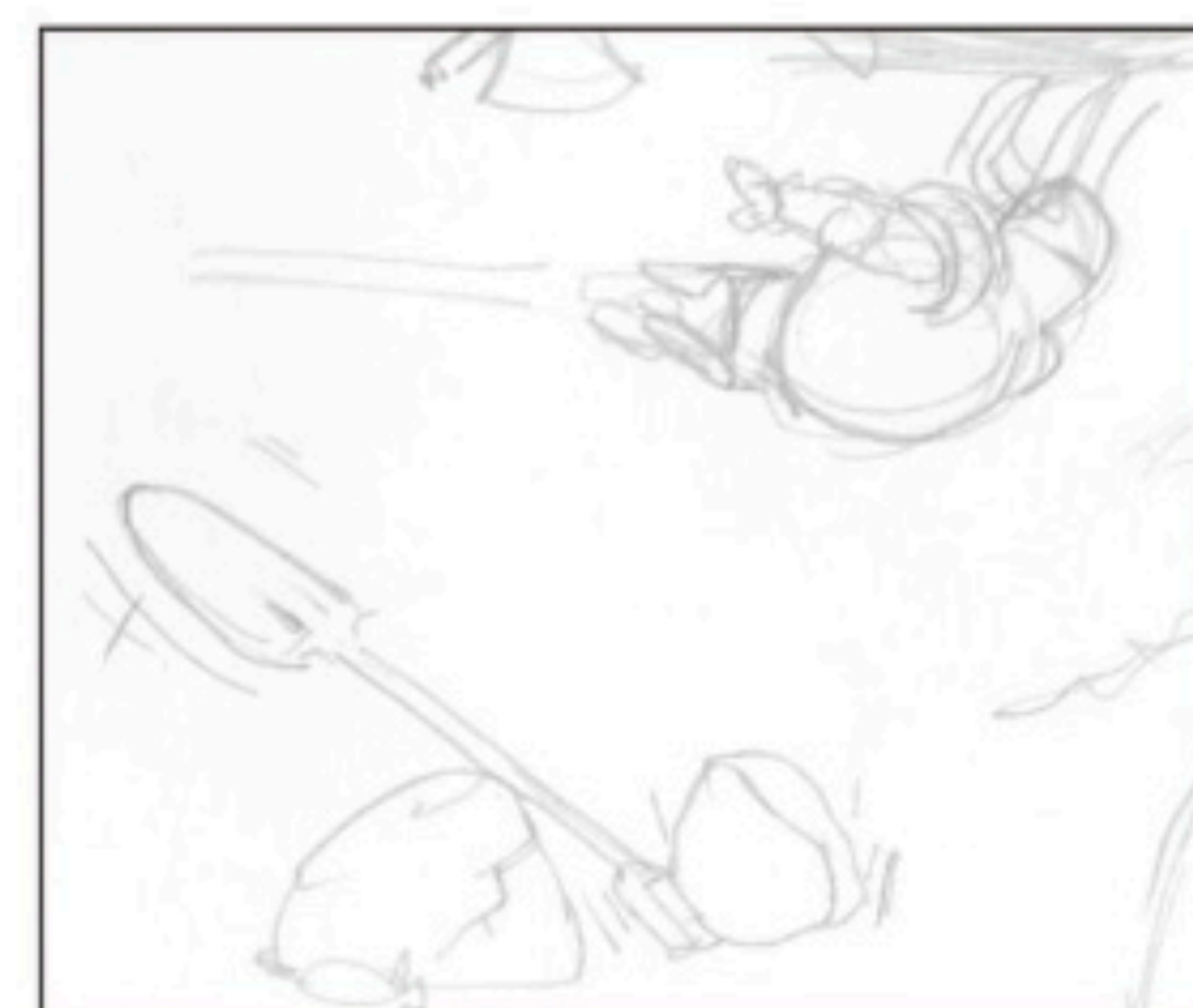
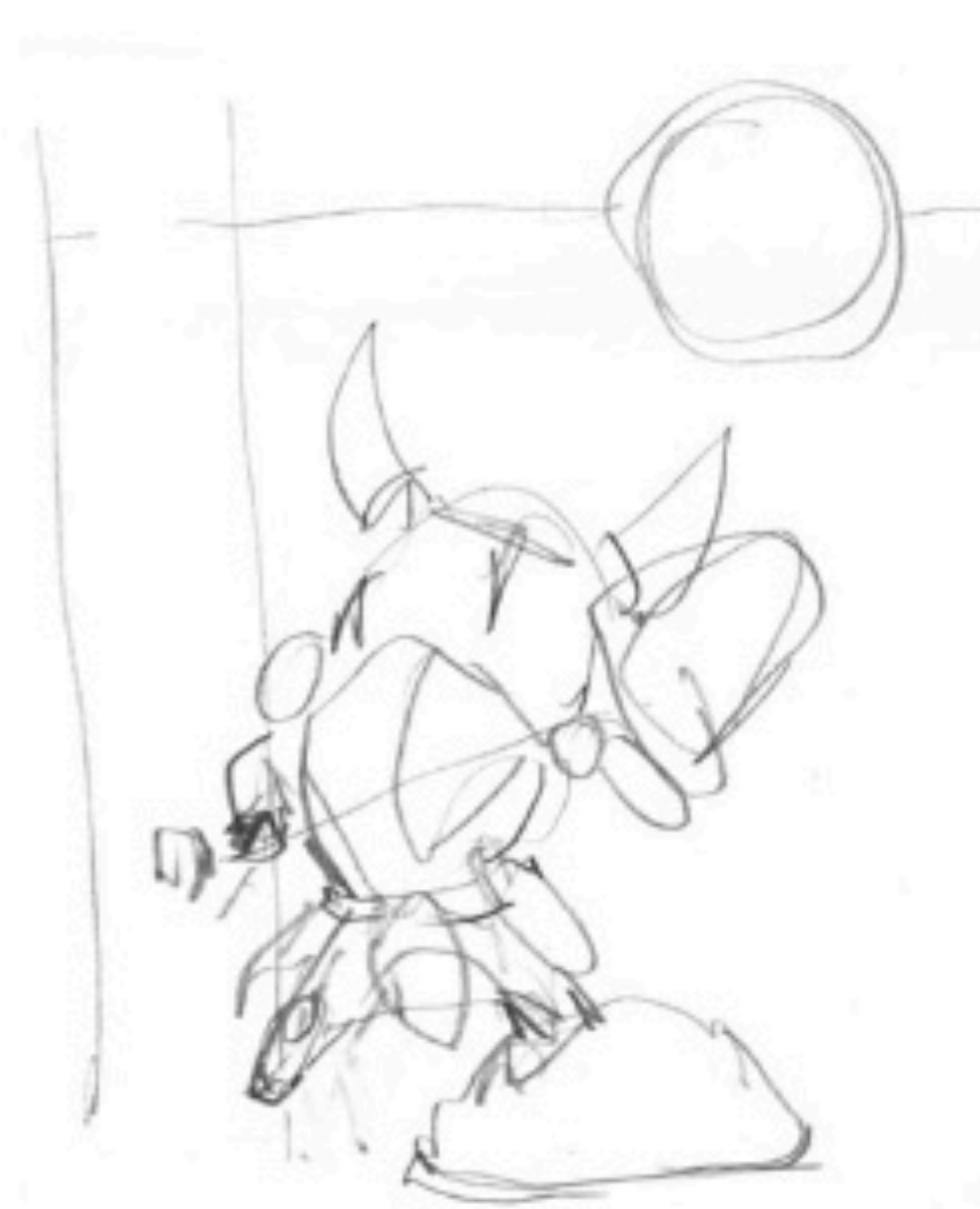
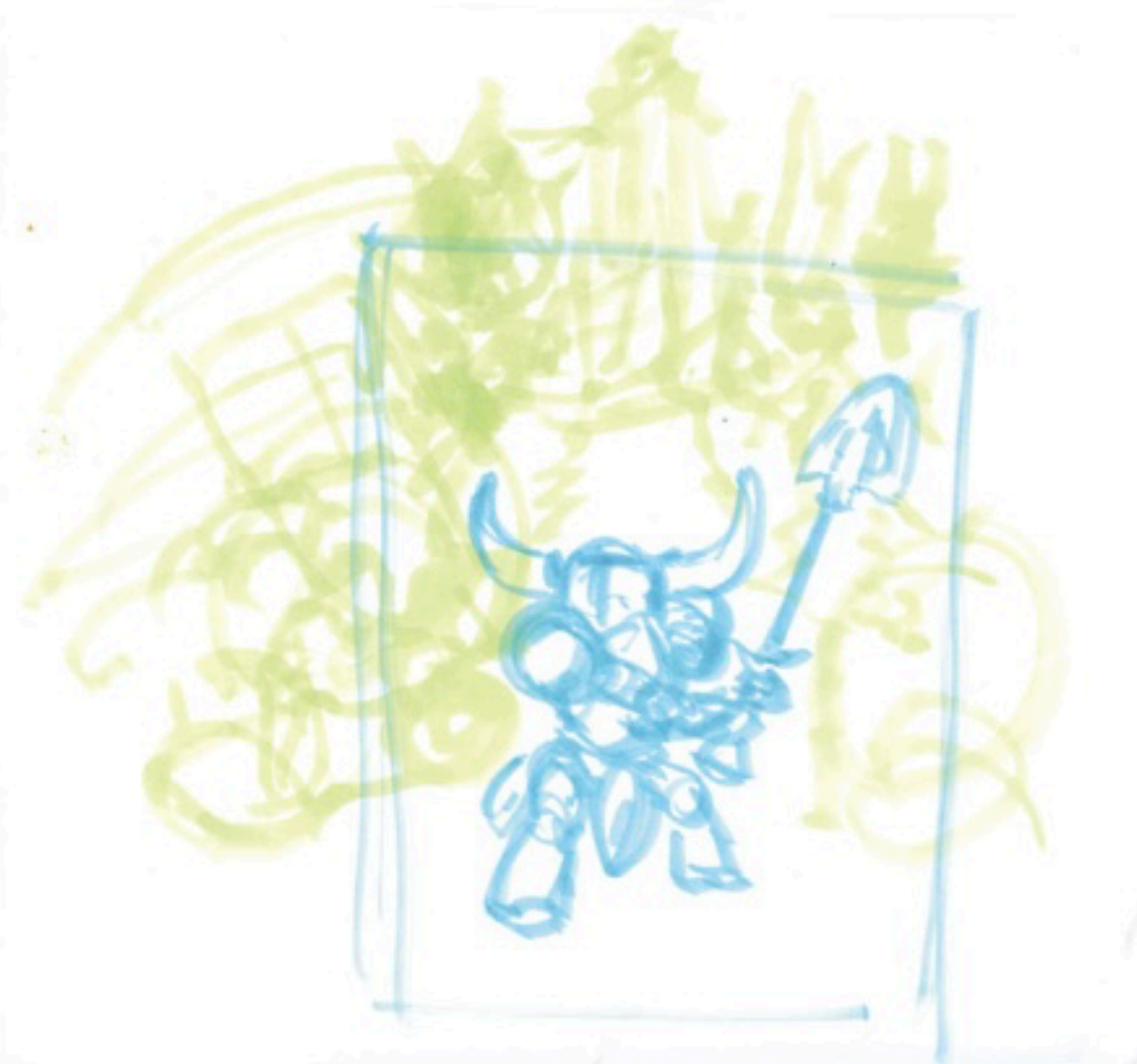
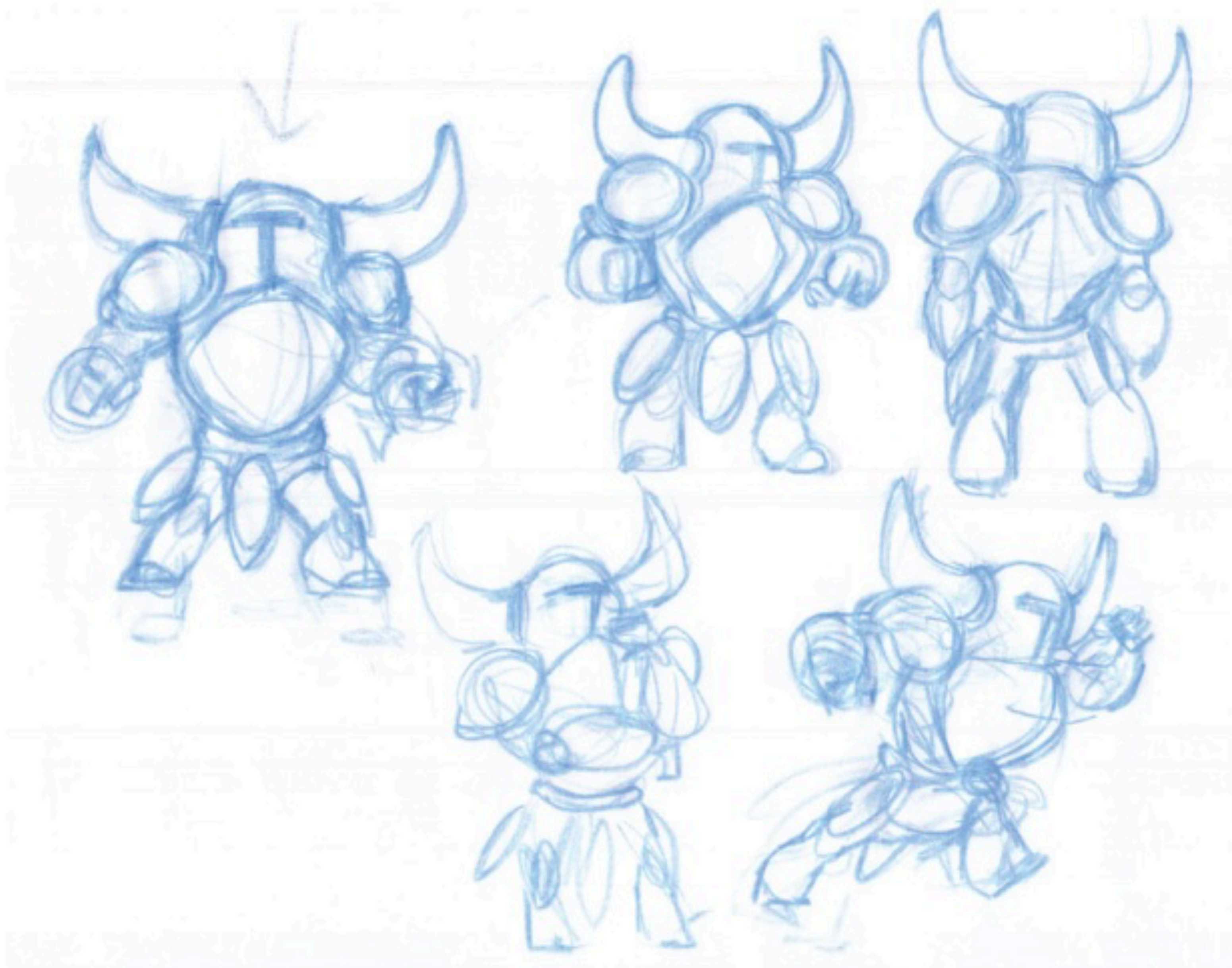
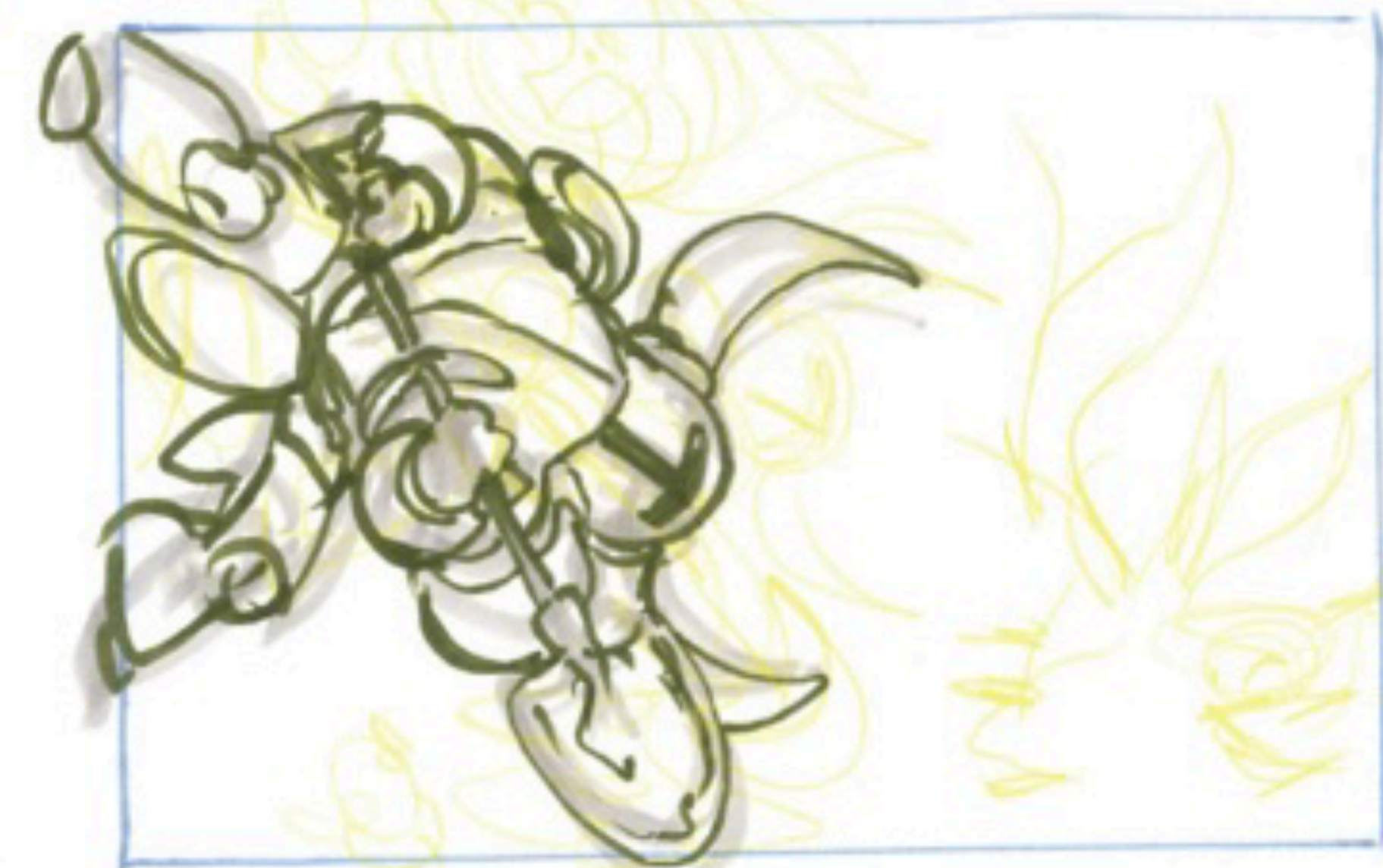
# SHOVEL KNIGHT



SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS







#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We had a lot of crazy ideas about how Shovel Knight could use his shovel, like seesaw-launching himself by tossing a rock. We ended up keeping things simpler overall.



# SHOVEL KNIGHT (CONTINUED)



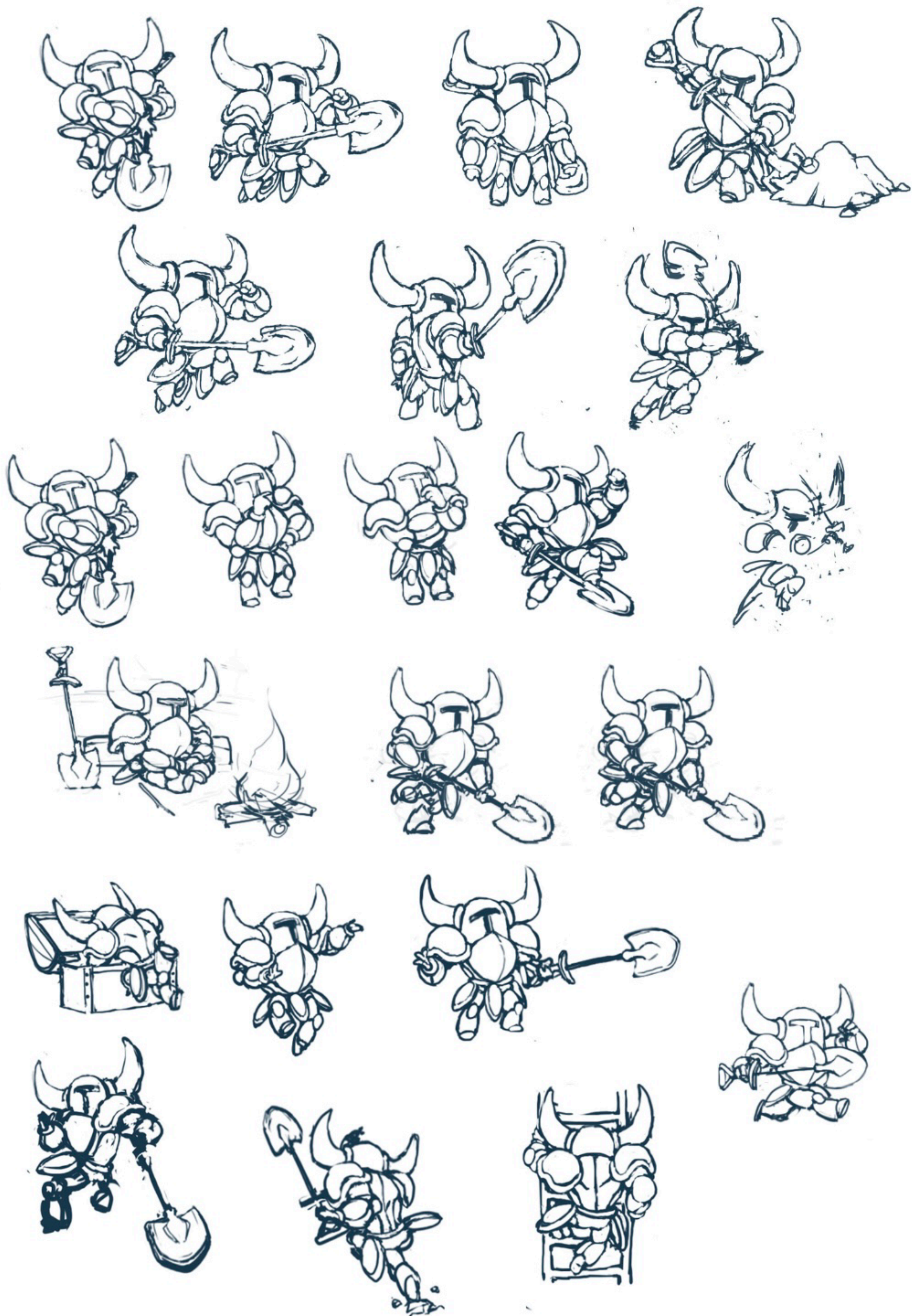
## DEV. COMMENTARY

This is the sketch for the first illustration of Shovel Knight! He even has a scabbard for his Shovel Blade, which was cut early on.

SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS

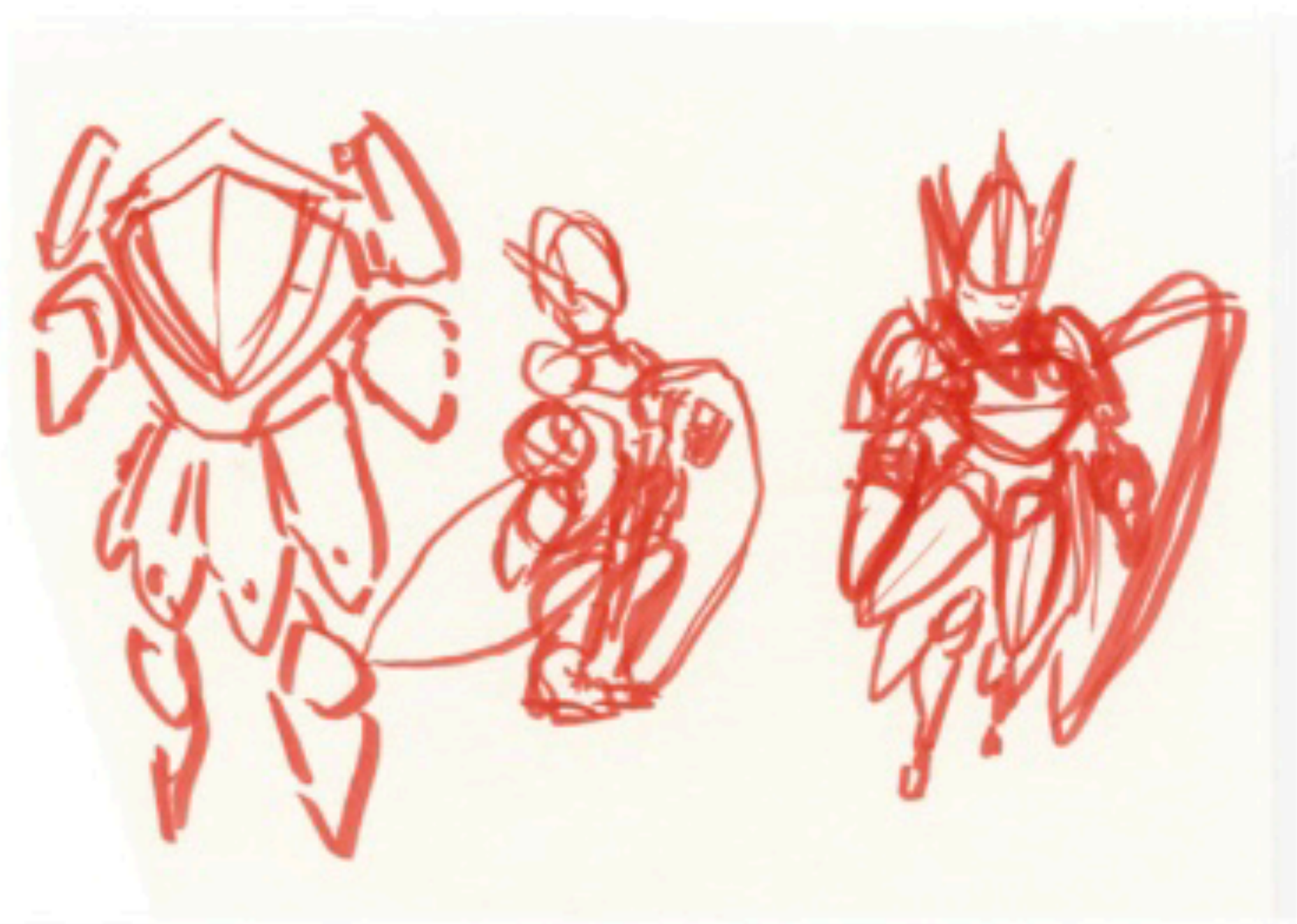








# SHIELD KNIGHT



SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS









## "BELOVED" (EARLY SHIELD KNIGHT CONCEPT)

### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Originally, there was no Shield Knight! She used to be more of a generic princess (although she was still the Enchantress all along). But we wanted Shovel Knight to fight alongside an equally adventurous partner, so we made her a cool knight instead.



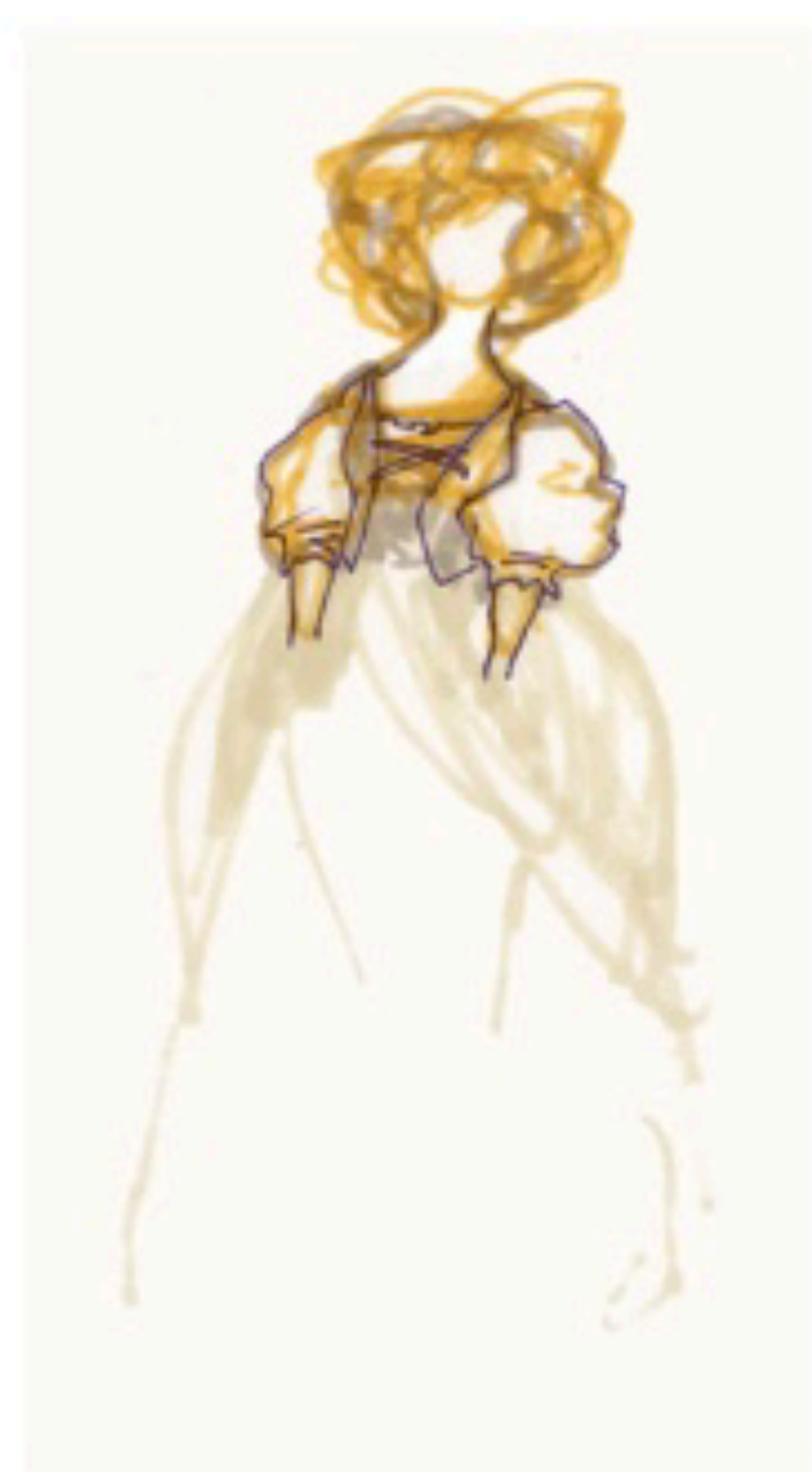
### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We went so far as to print buttons of this character before she became Shield Knight. We never handed them out, though, because we had a feeling she was going to change.

SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS









# BLACK KNIGHT



## DEV. COMMENTARY

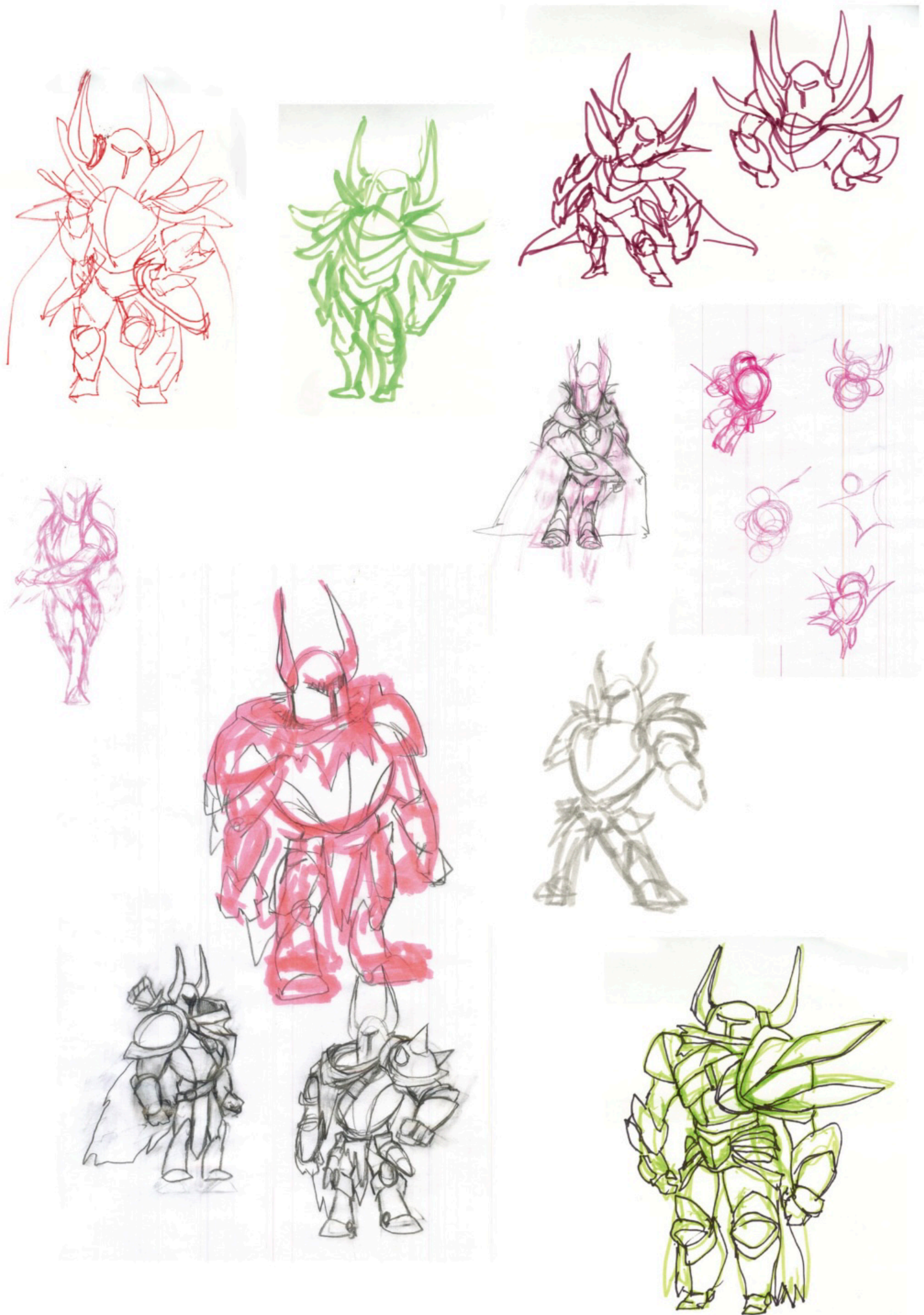
Many of these sketches are for Giga Black Knight. You can see how much "cooler" he is with tattered clothes and asymmetry.



SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS

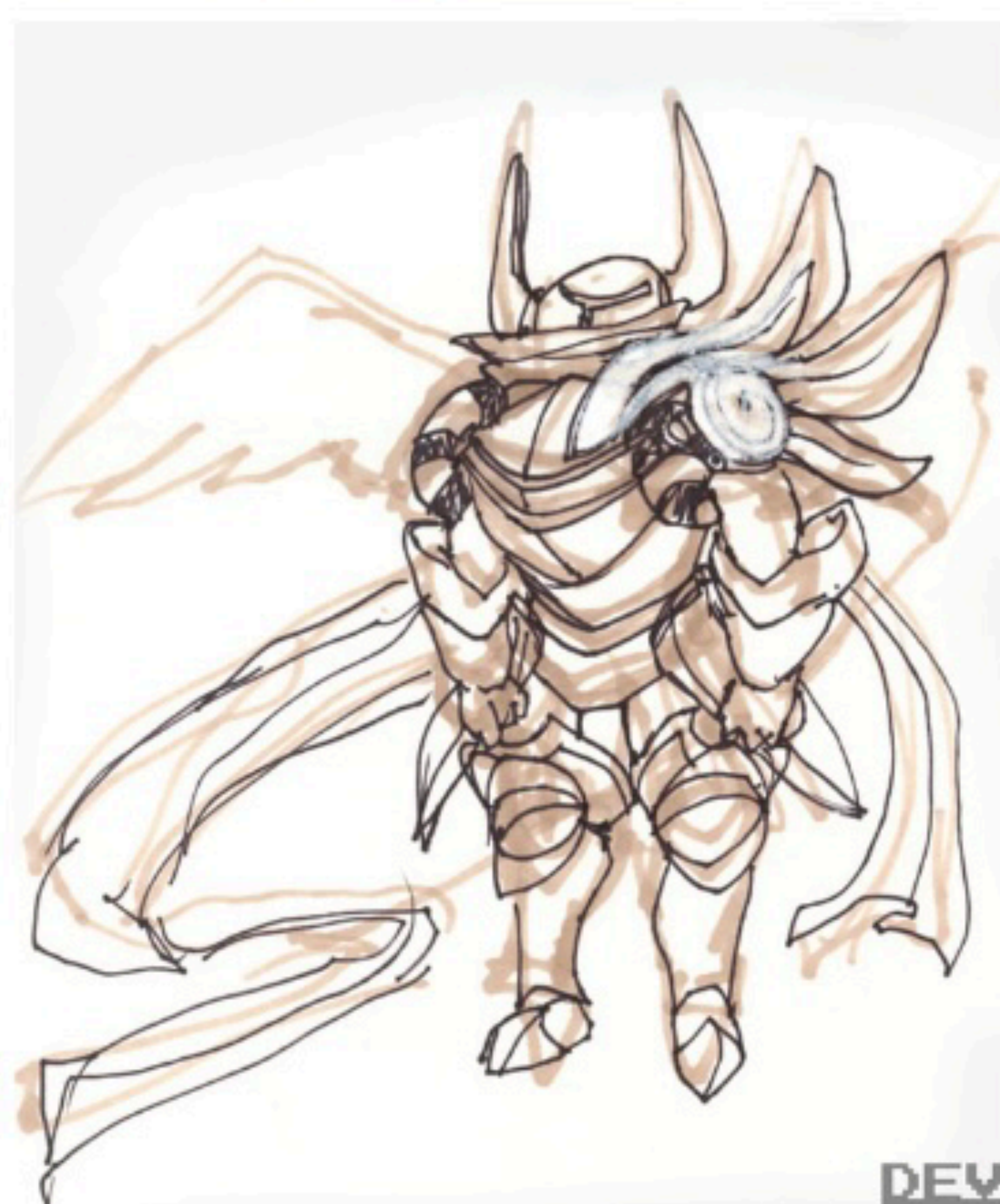
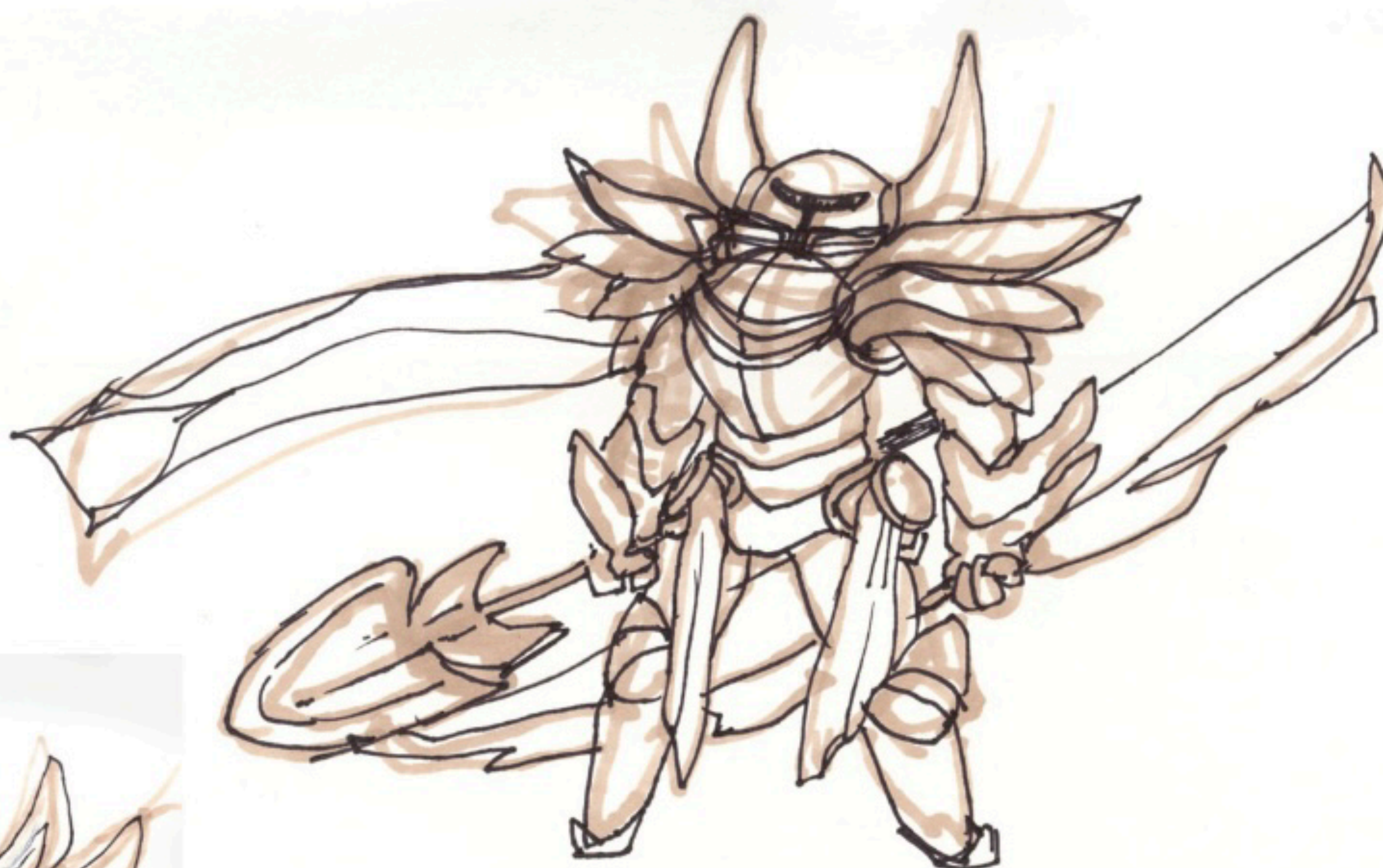








# BLACK KNIGHT ("GIGA" BLACK KNIGHT)



## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Black Knight's "fallen" form was an attempt at channeling anime tropes. He even has a bow to complete his dark angel motif.



SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS



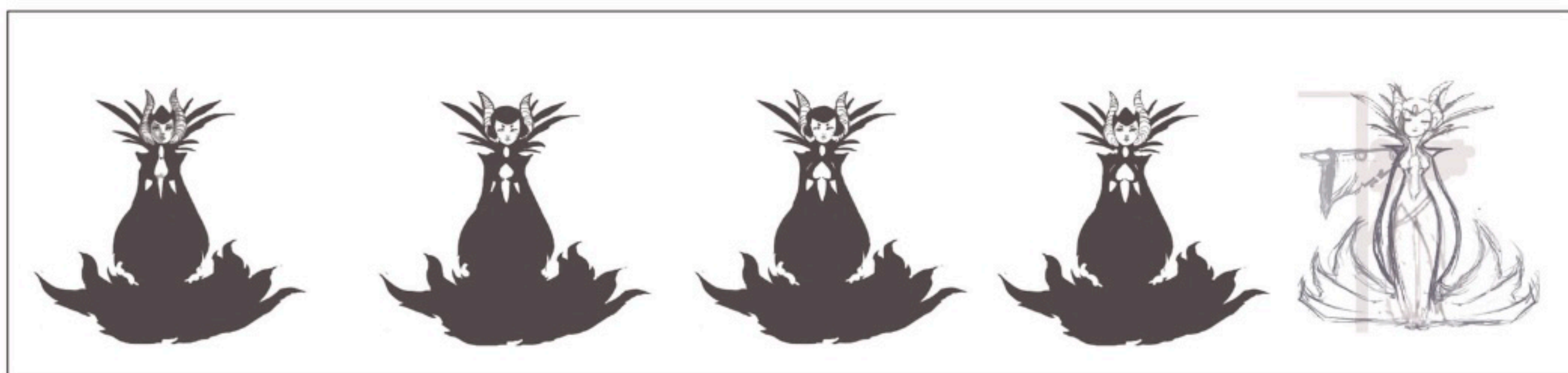
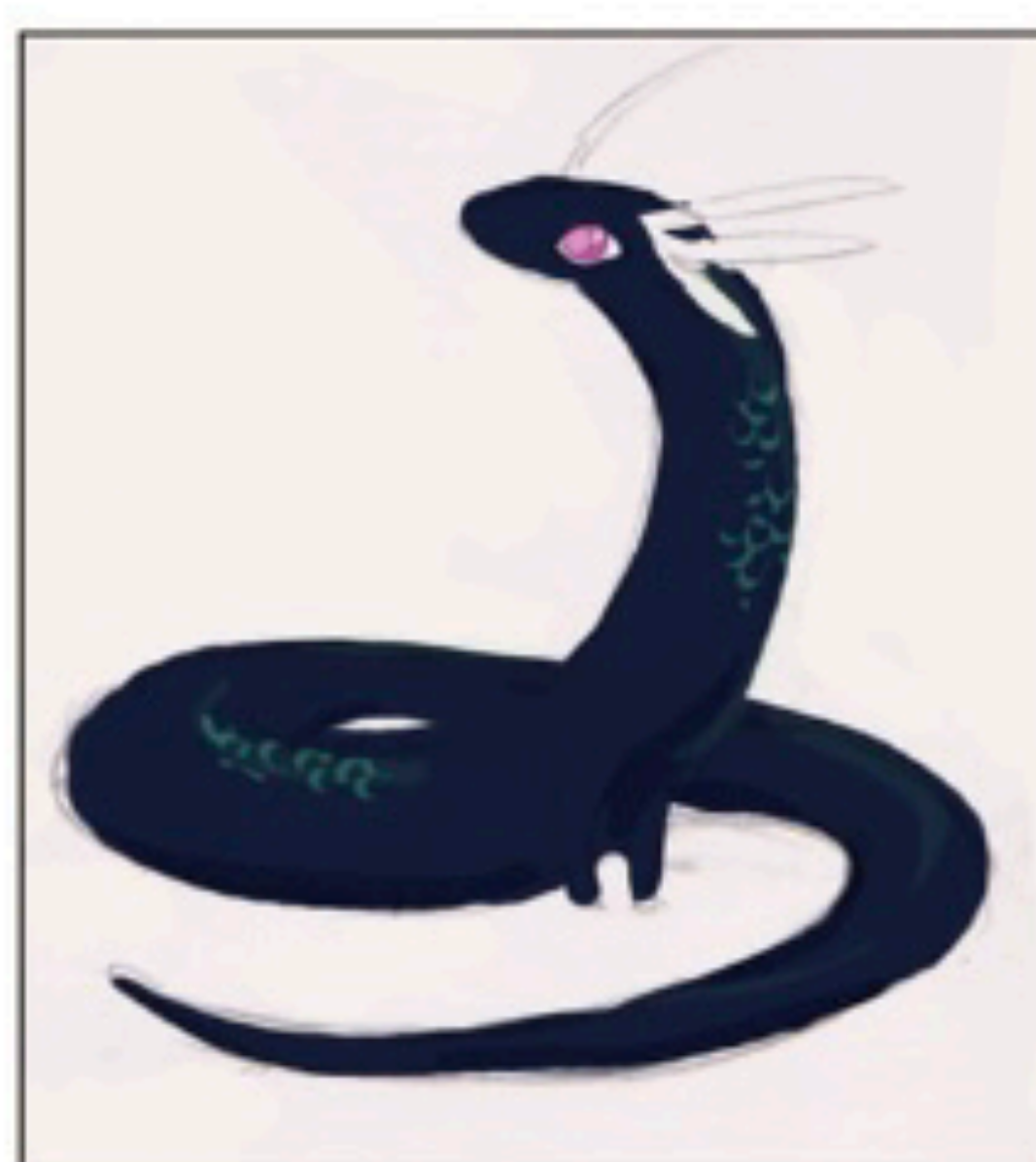
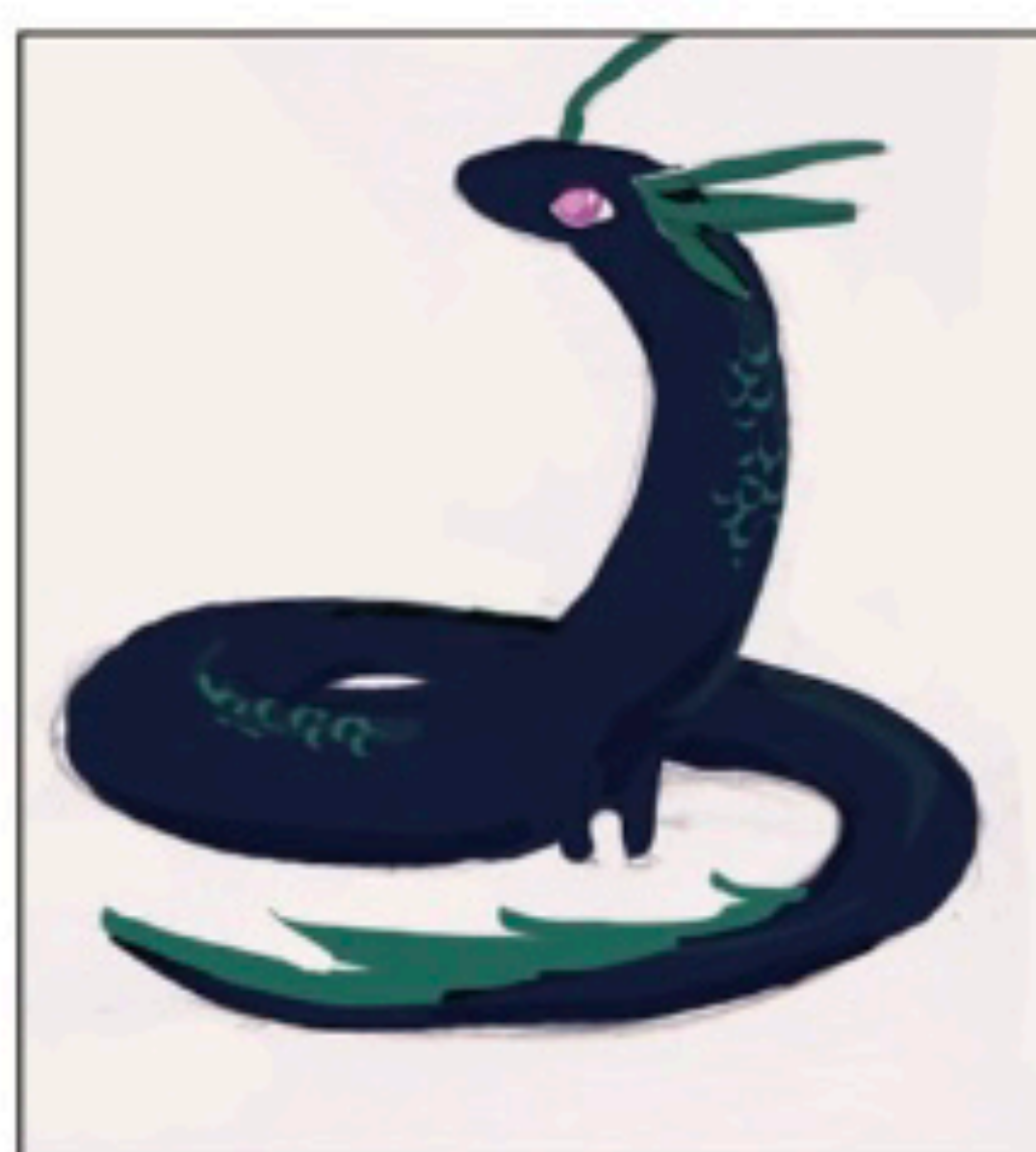


# THE ENCHANTRESS



## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

At one point, the Enchantress had a "familiar"-like pet that would rest around her neck like a boa. You'd fight it as a boss too! Maybe this idea could return one day...





# THE ENCHANTRESS (CONTINUED)



SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS





# TINKER KNIGHT

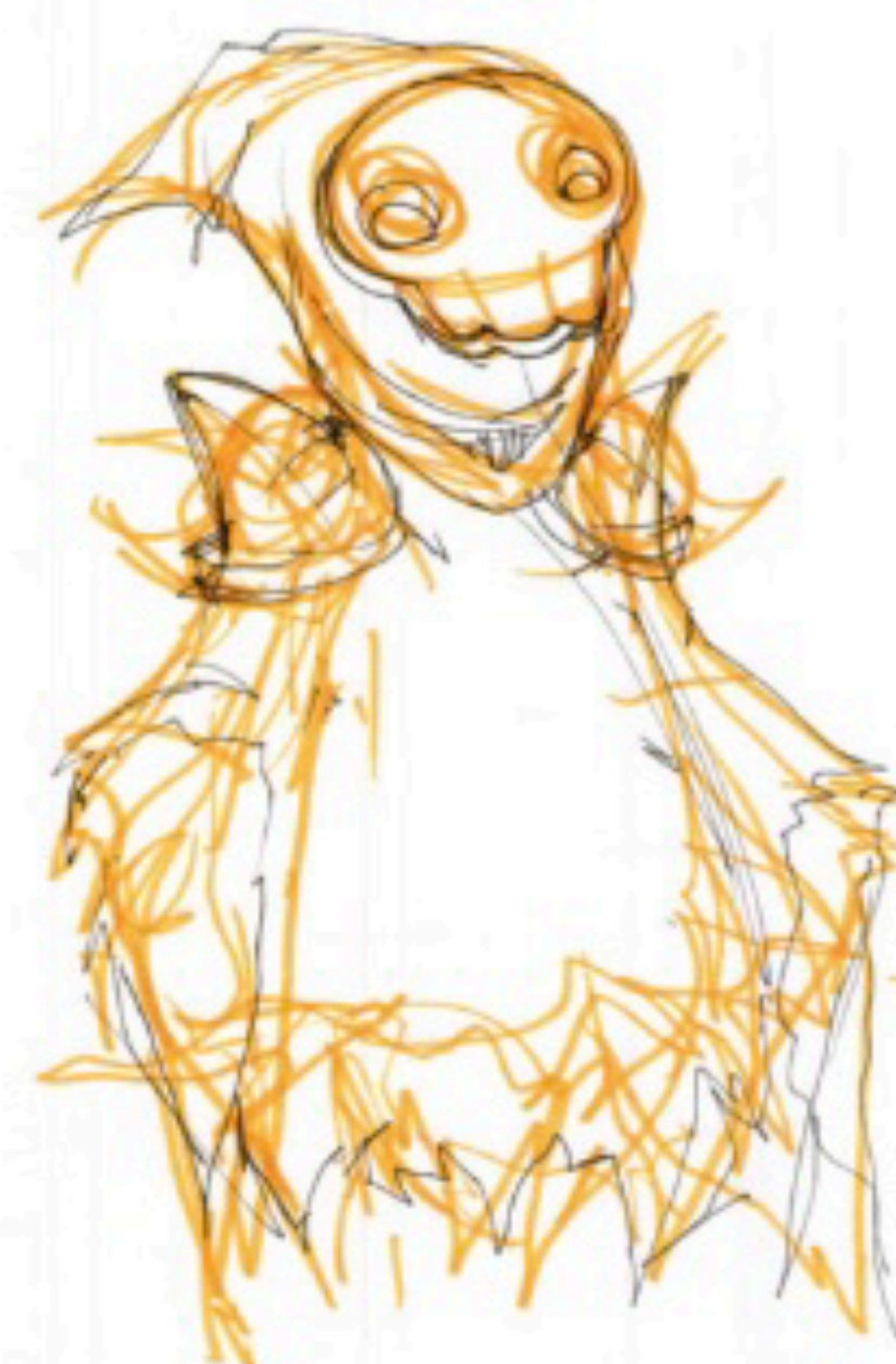
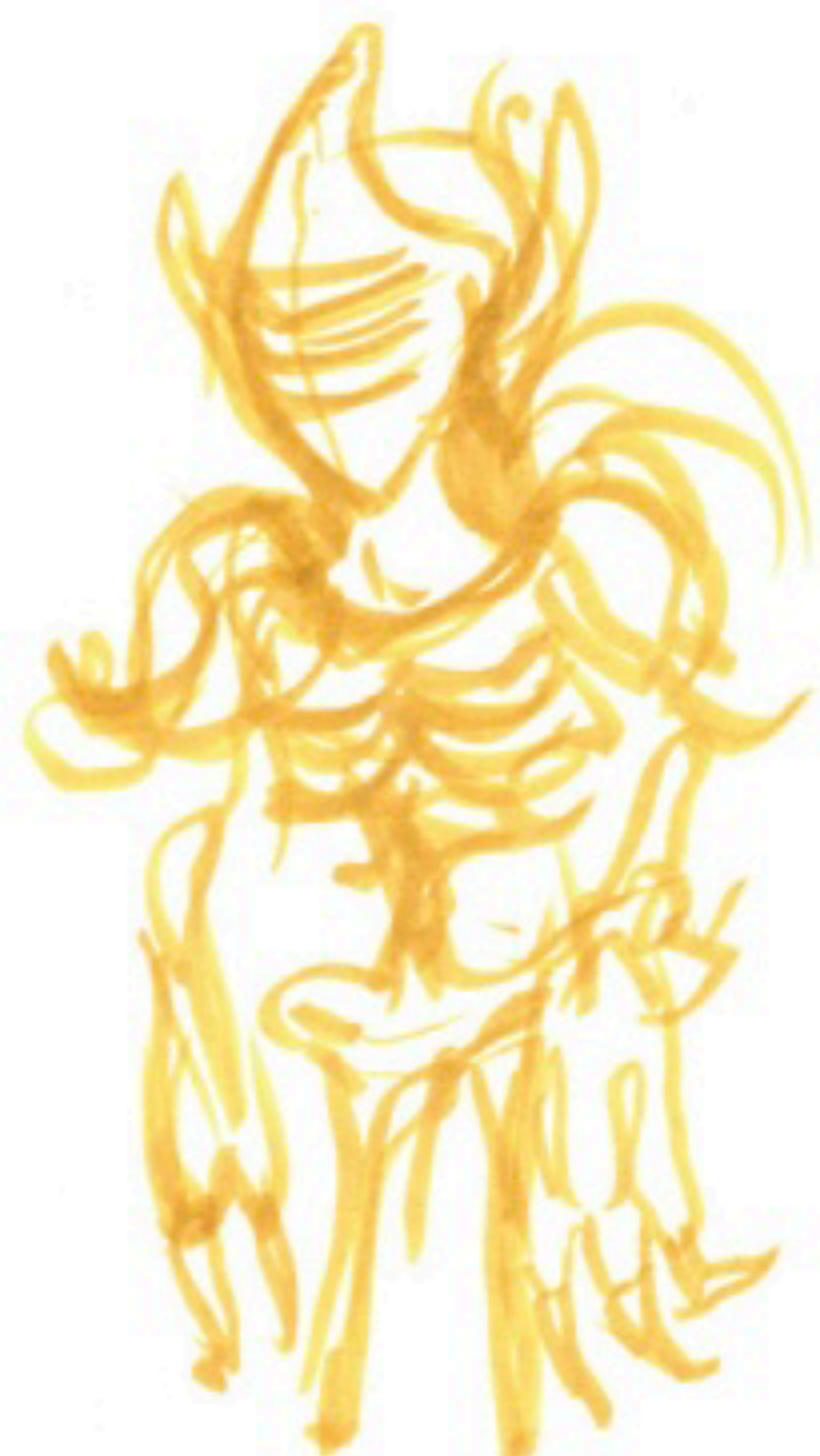
## DEV. COMMENTARY

Originally Tinker Knight's robot was a lot smaller, but it grew as the game developed.





# SPECTER KNIGHT

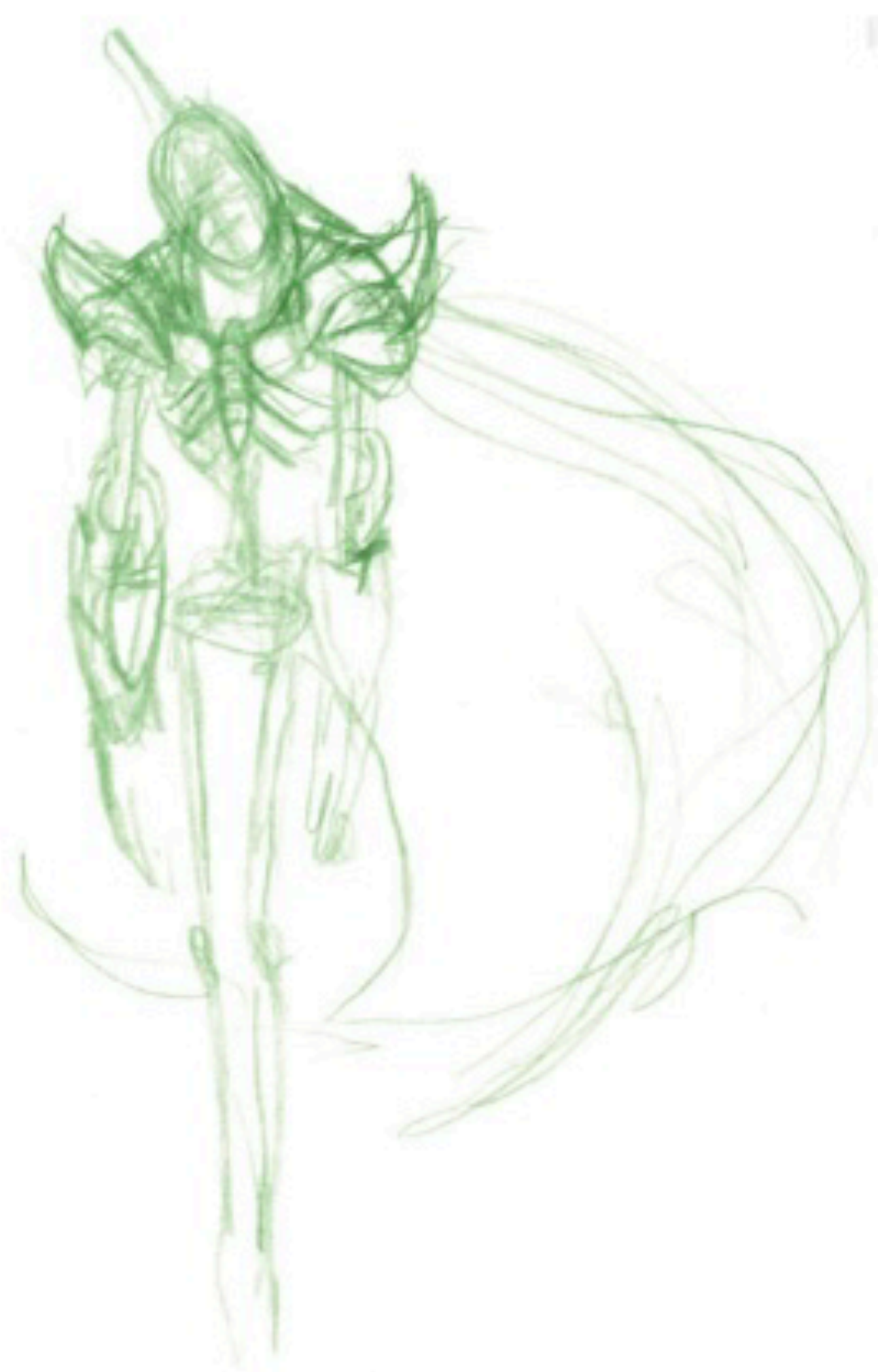
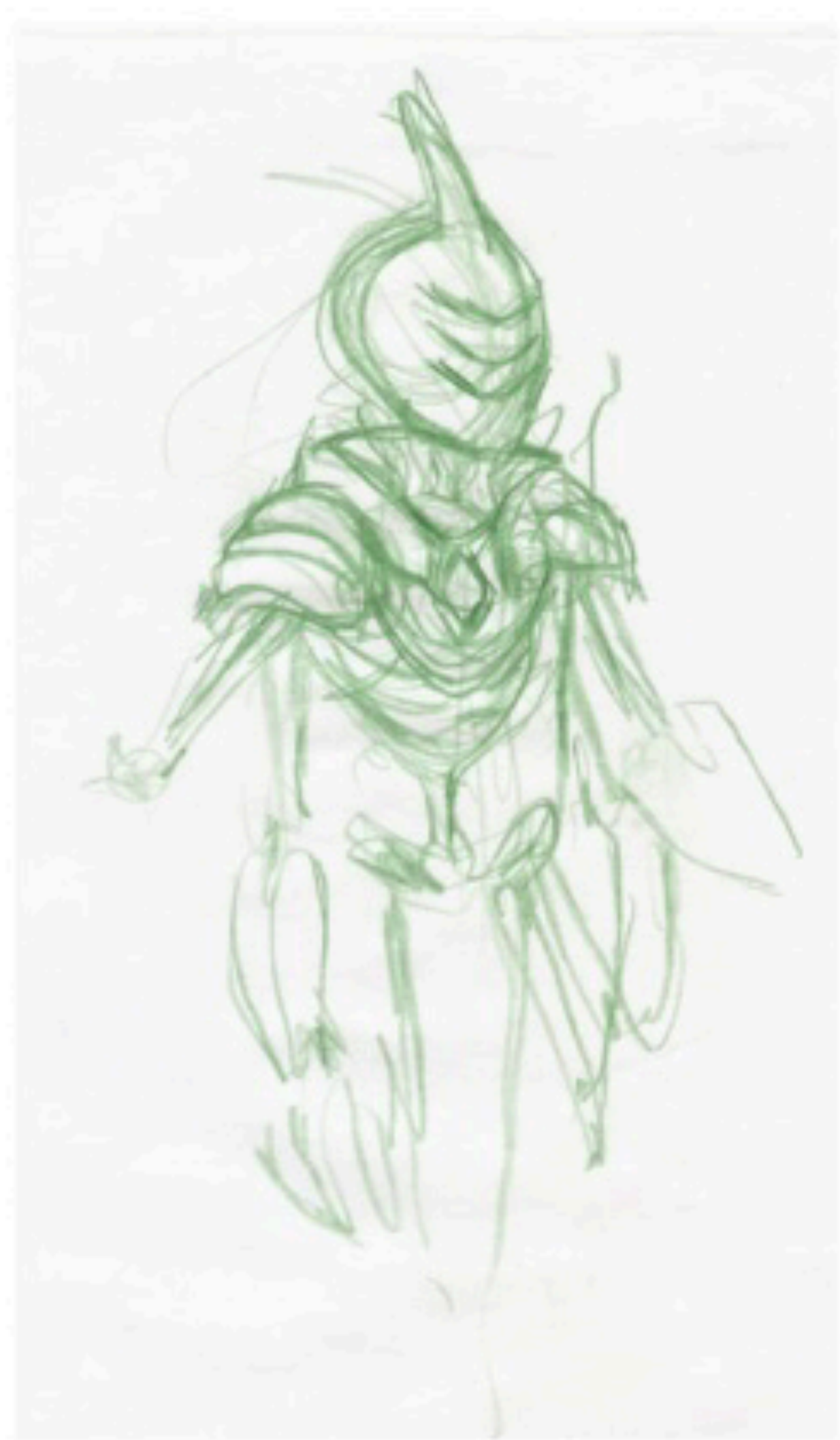


## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We tried a ton of different faces for Specter Knight, even after his other elements were settled. We solved this conundrum by putting the mask underneath the hood!







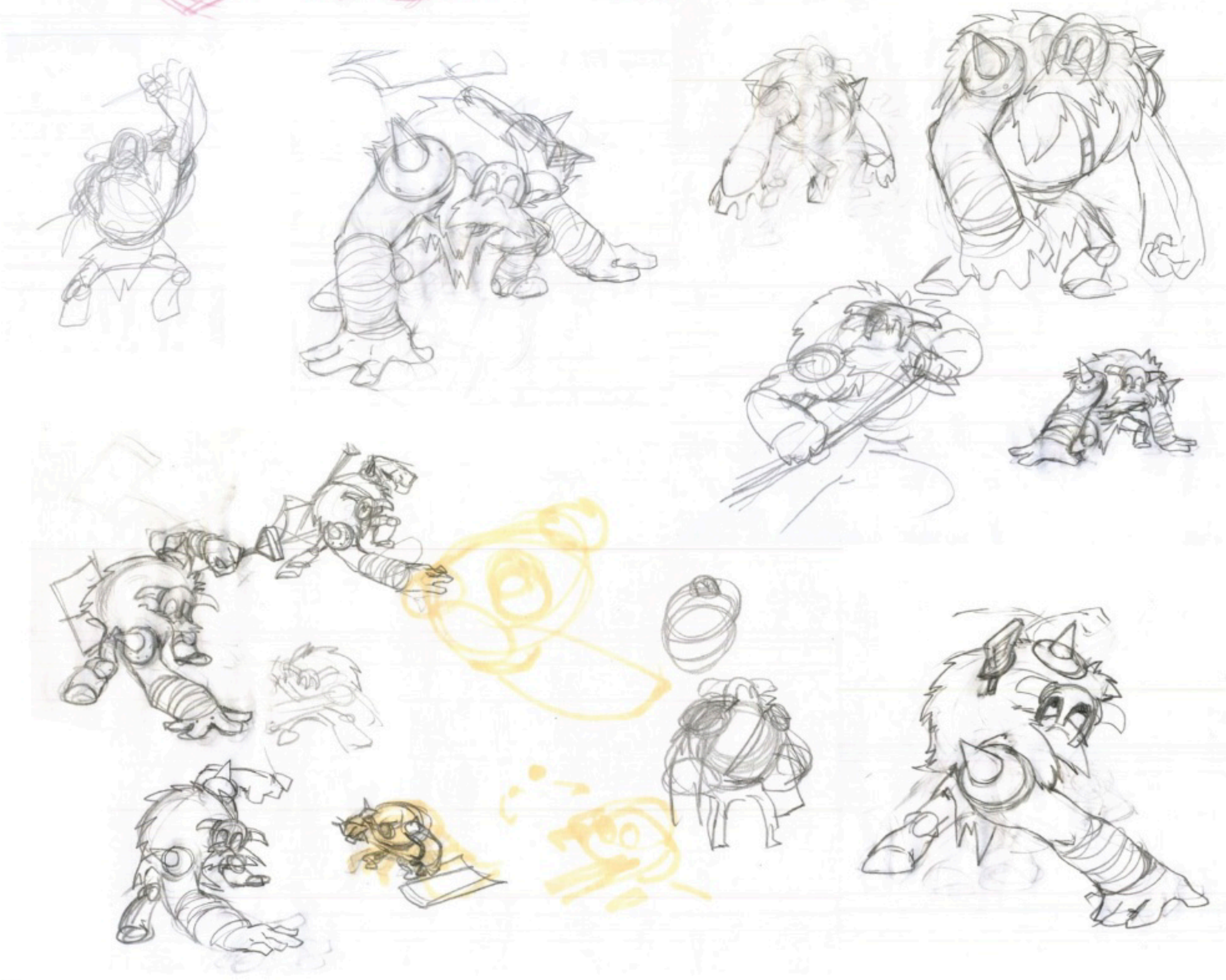


# POLAR KNIGHT



## DEV. COMMENTARY

*Polar Knight naturally adopts a hunched over pose because of his massive, long arms.*



SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS

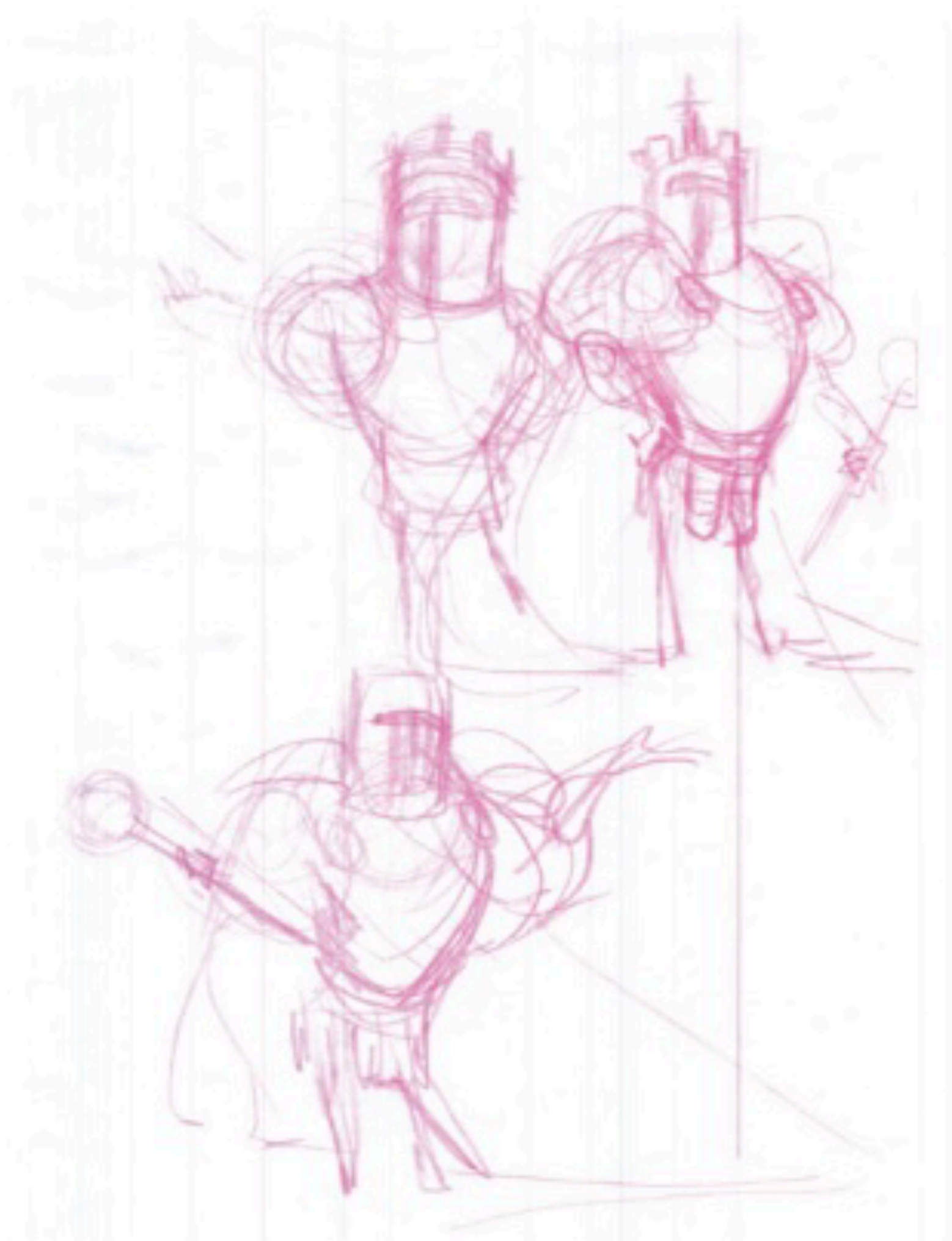




## PLAGUE KNIGHT



## KING KNIGHT



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We like King Knight as much as we do because we can see so much of ourselves in him. Is that scary?



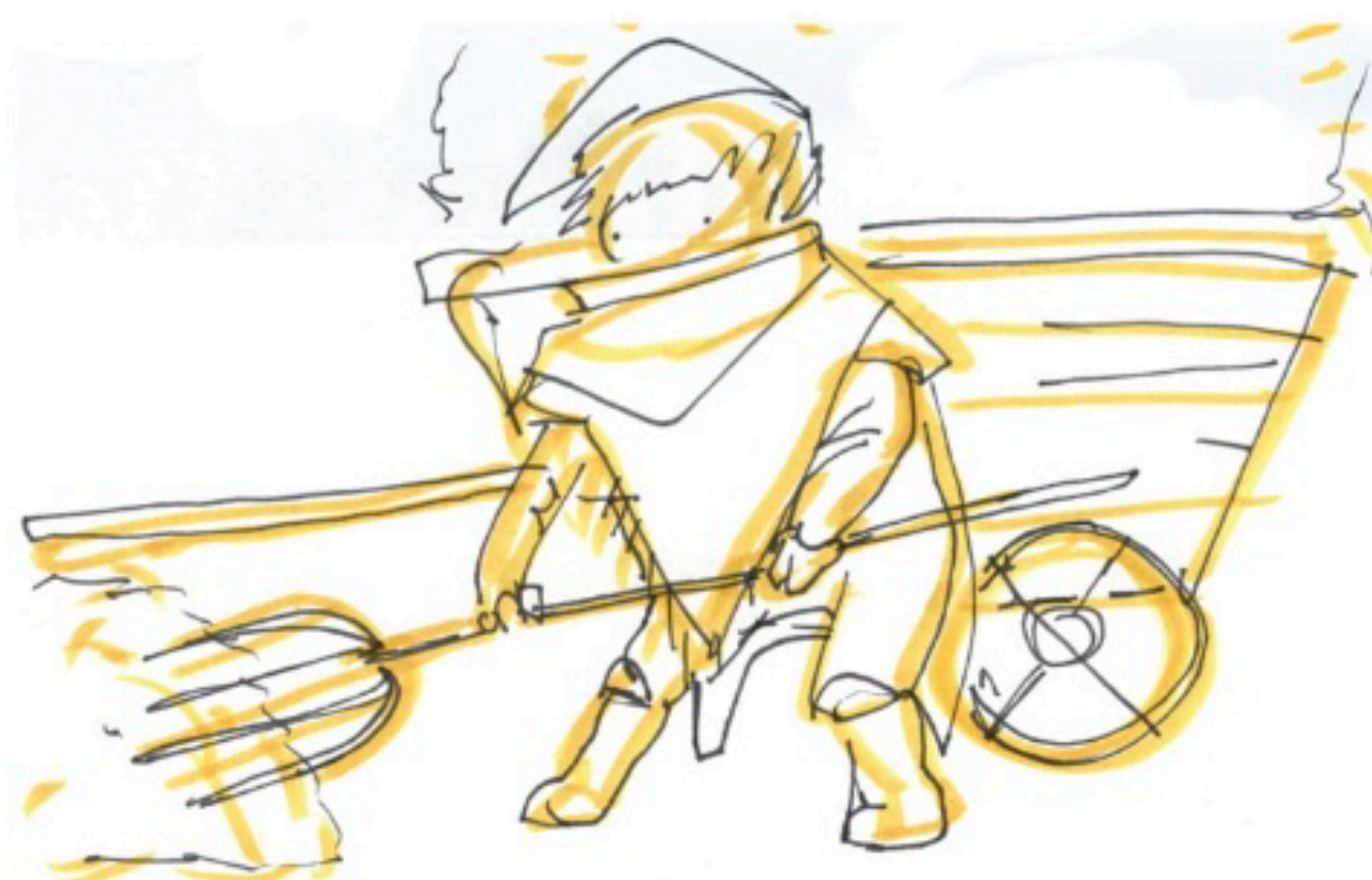
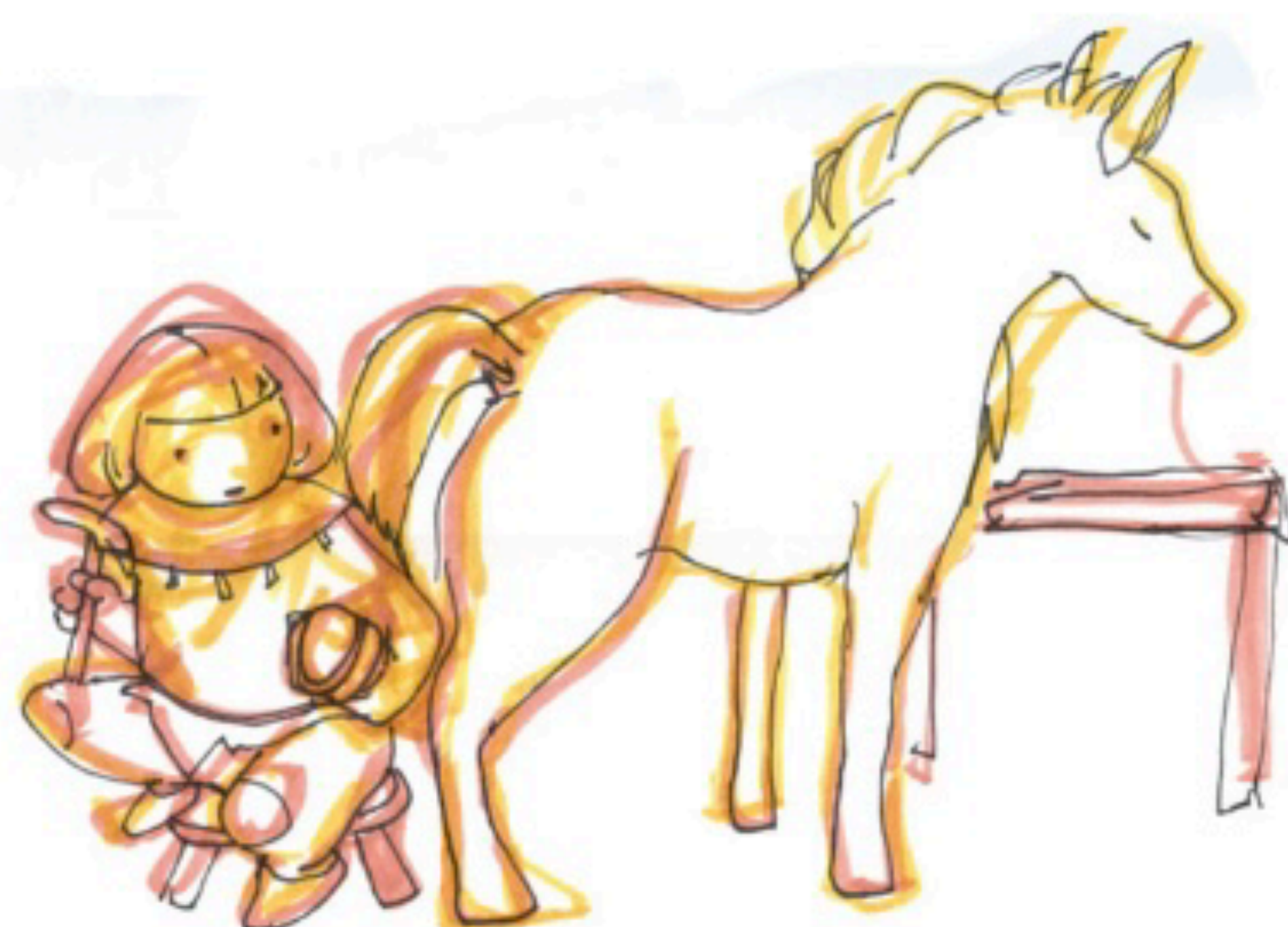
### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We made this little doodle to promote King Knight for the "Dig the Vote" campaign. We really wanted to see him win!





# VILLAGERS

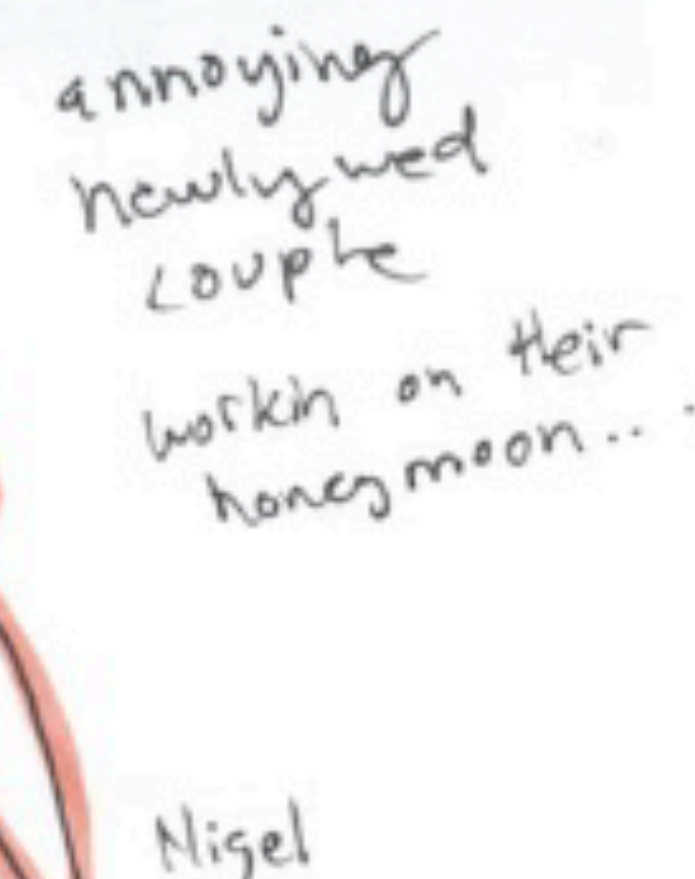
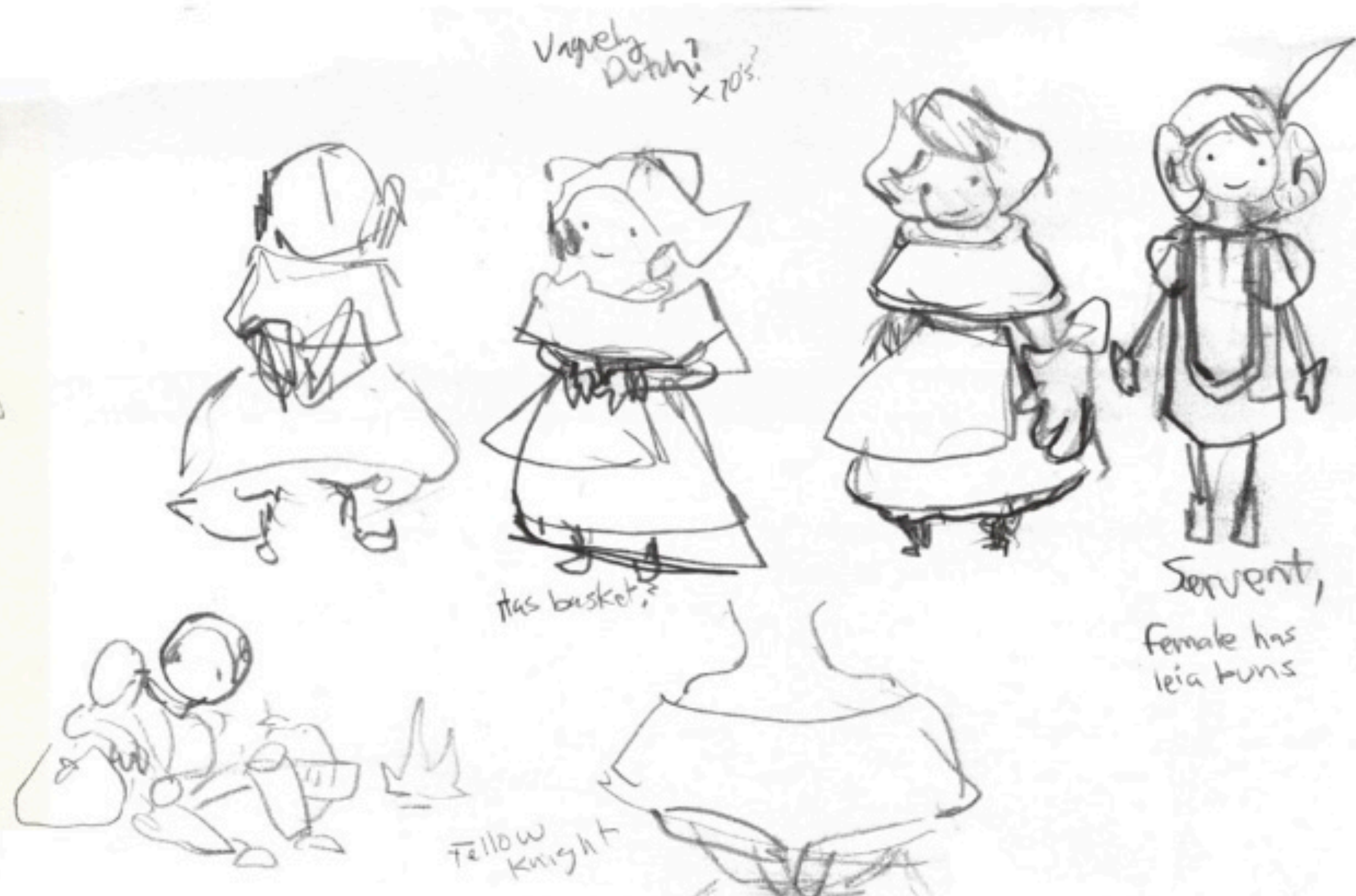


## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We conceived of the villagers all at once to keep them cohesive. Most of these characters aren't used, but you can see early forms of Pippin, the Fisherman, and the Mushroom Gatherer.









# VILLAGERS (CONTINUED)

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We struggled to find a good design for the blacksmiths. Even their current designs aren't as distinctive as our other characters, but they work well as a pair.



AxolSmits  
classic to his craft  
taught Tinker Knight  
before...  
pays great homage  
to his lineage  
hair braided in back  
Name of Hammer  
Gildred



Brother2



Brother1

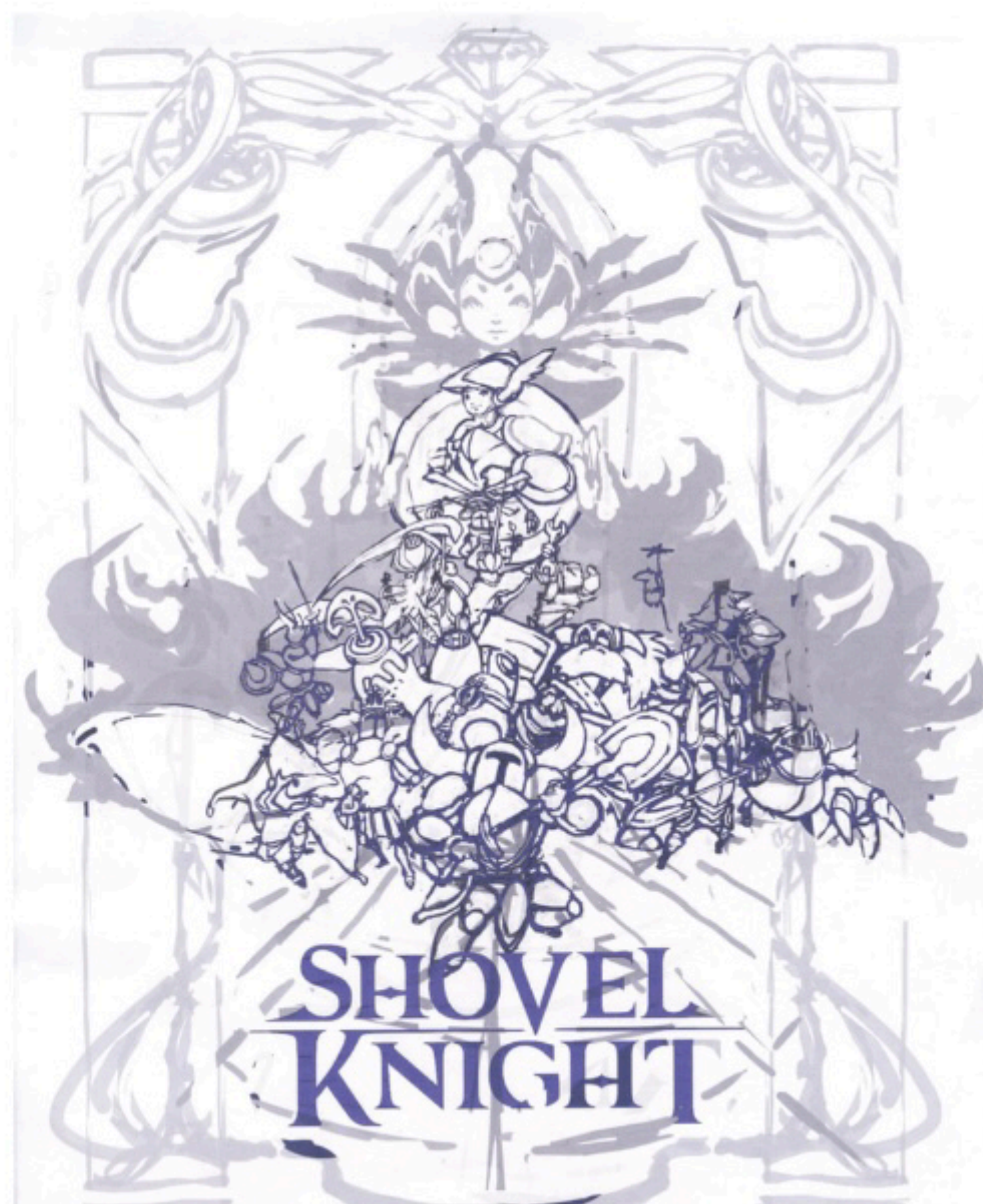




## TITLES AND LOGOS

### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*For our logo, we wanted to avoid doing anything too cute, like making one of the letters a shovel. Still, we wanted to allude to the game's tone and mechanics; you can see how the "V" is "digging" down into the lower portion. This logo was heavily inspired by Rastan.*



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*We didn't end up using this box art design because the characters were too small.*





# ENEMIES

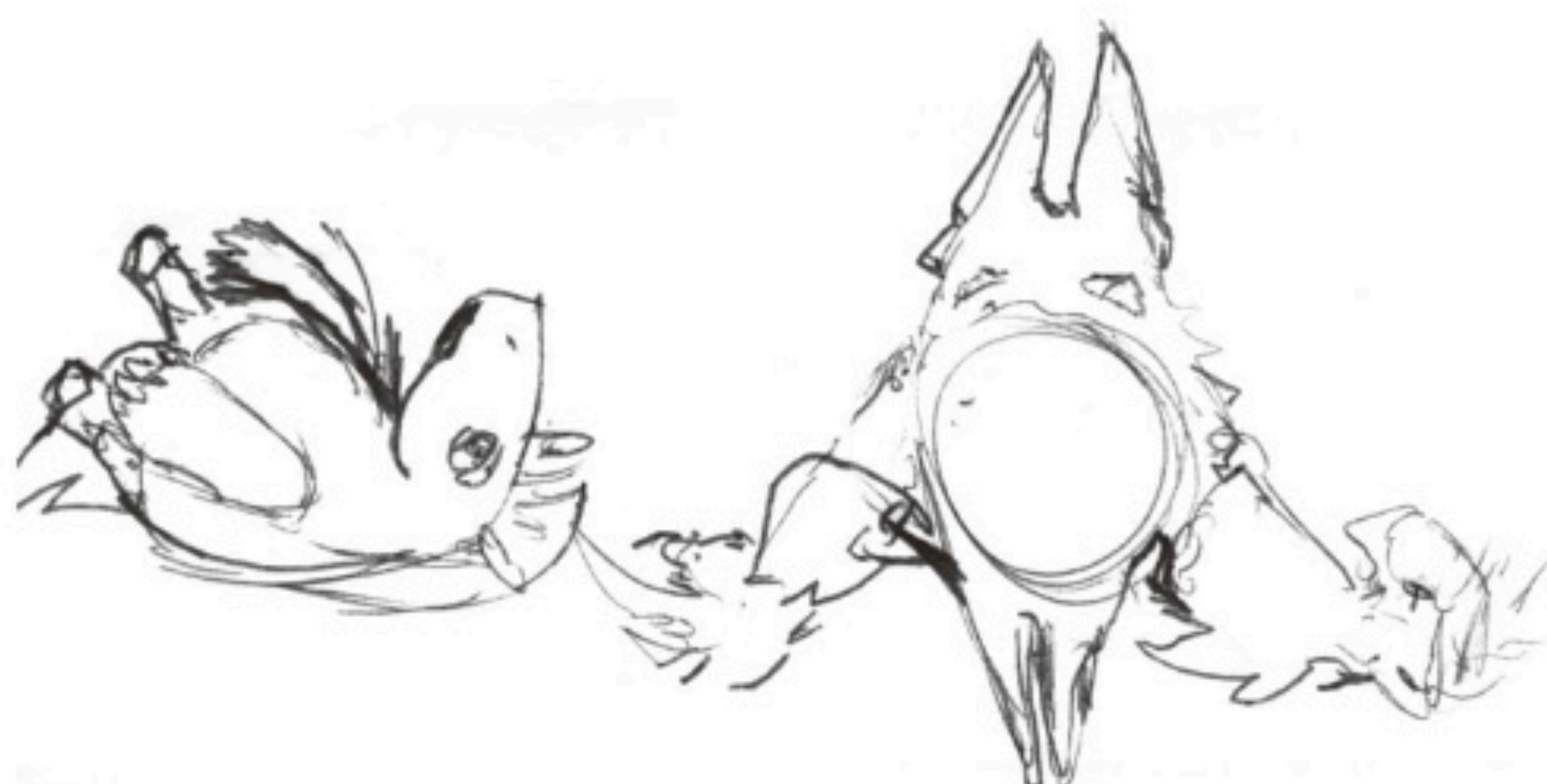


Northern2



## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

This idea of a boss filled with writhing rats was a bit too creepy for us to use.



like a windsock w/ travels

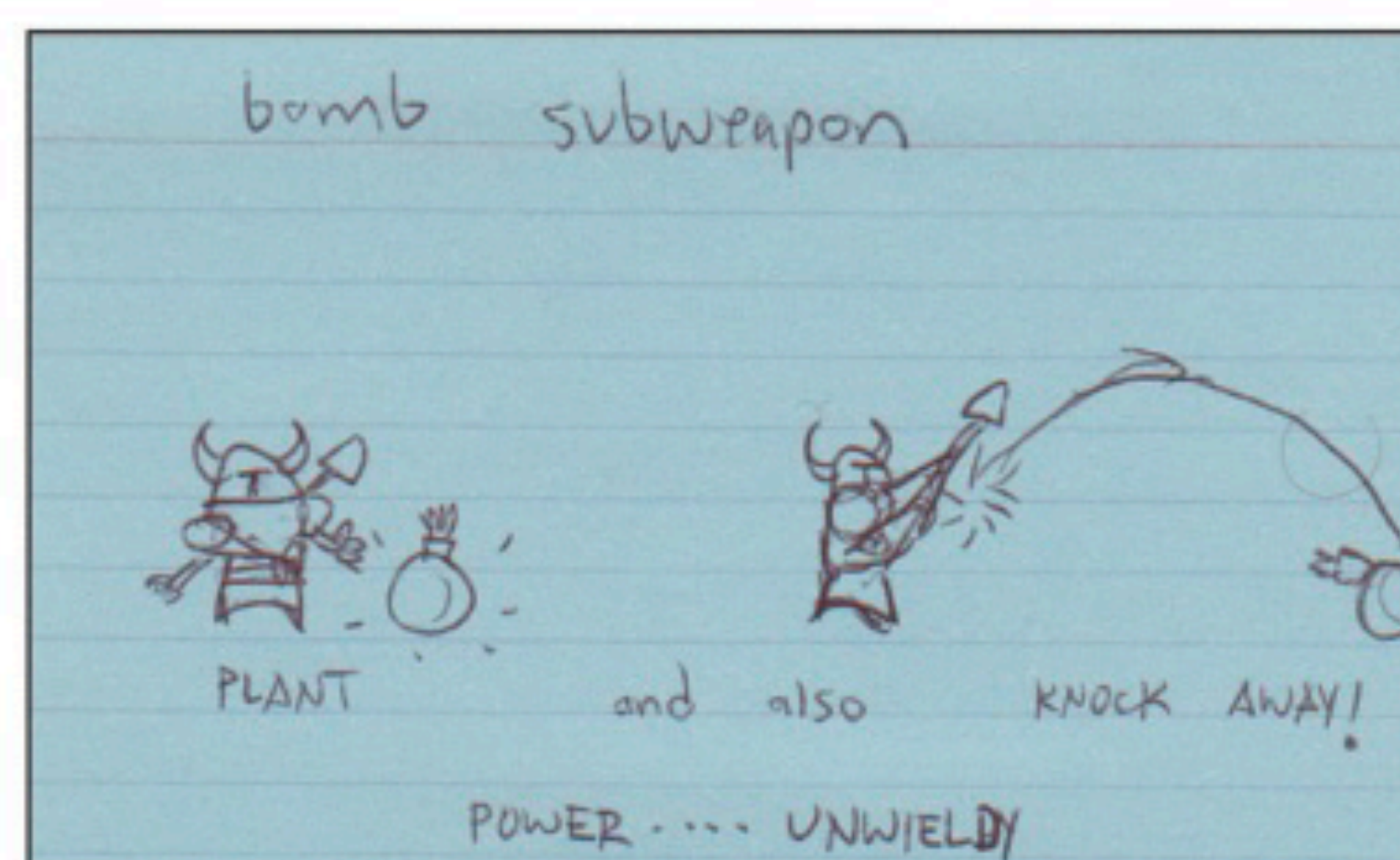
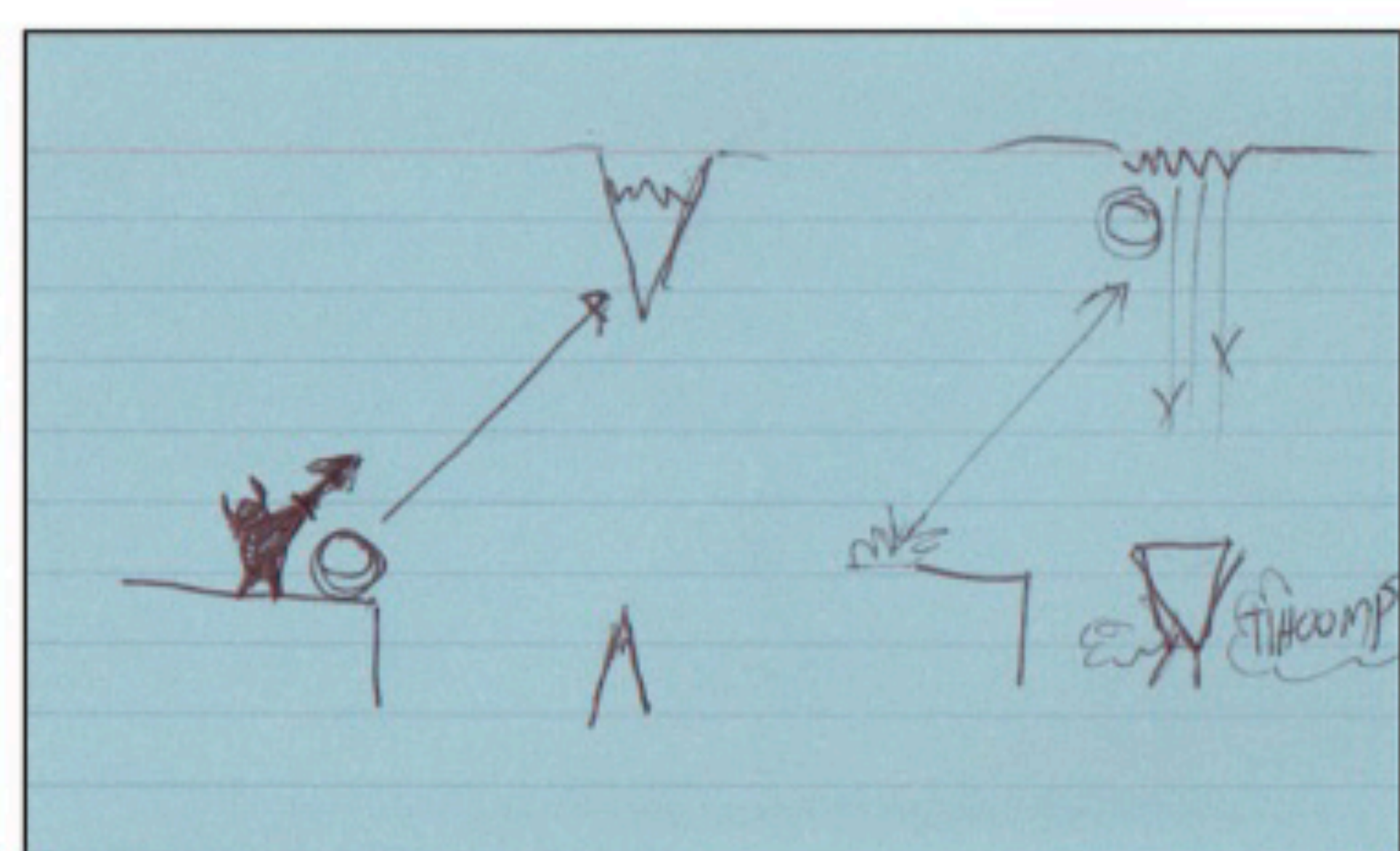
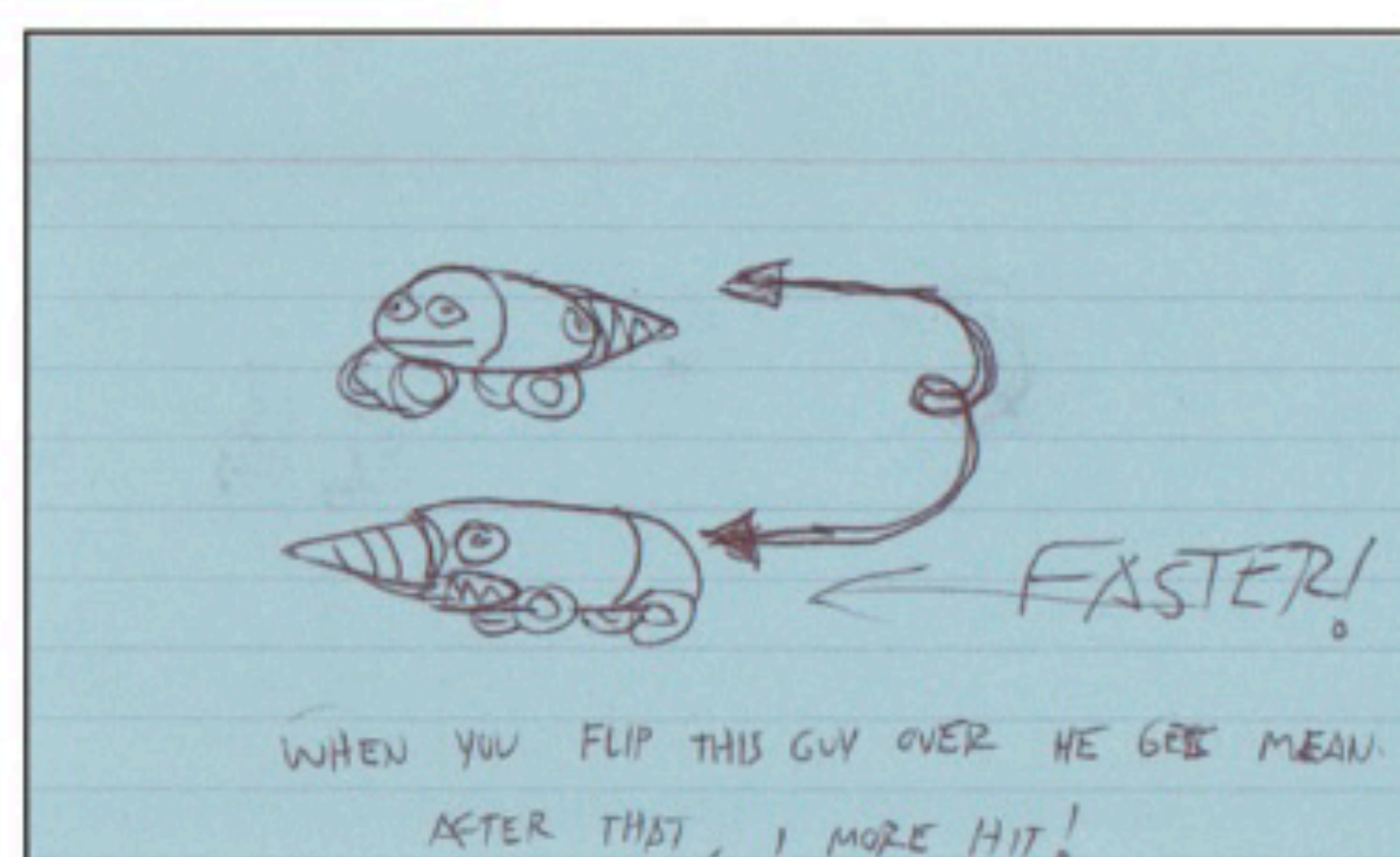
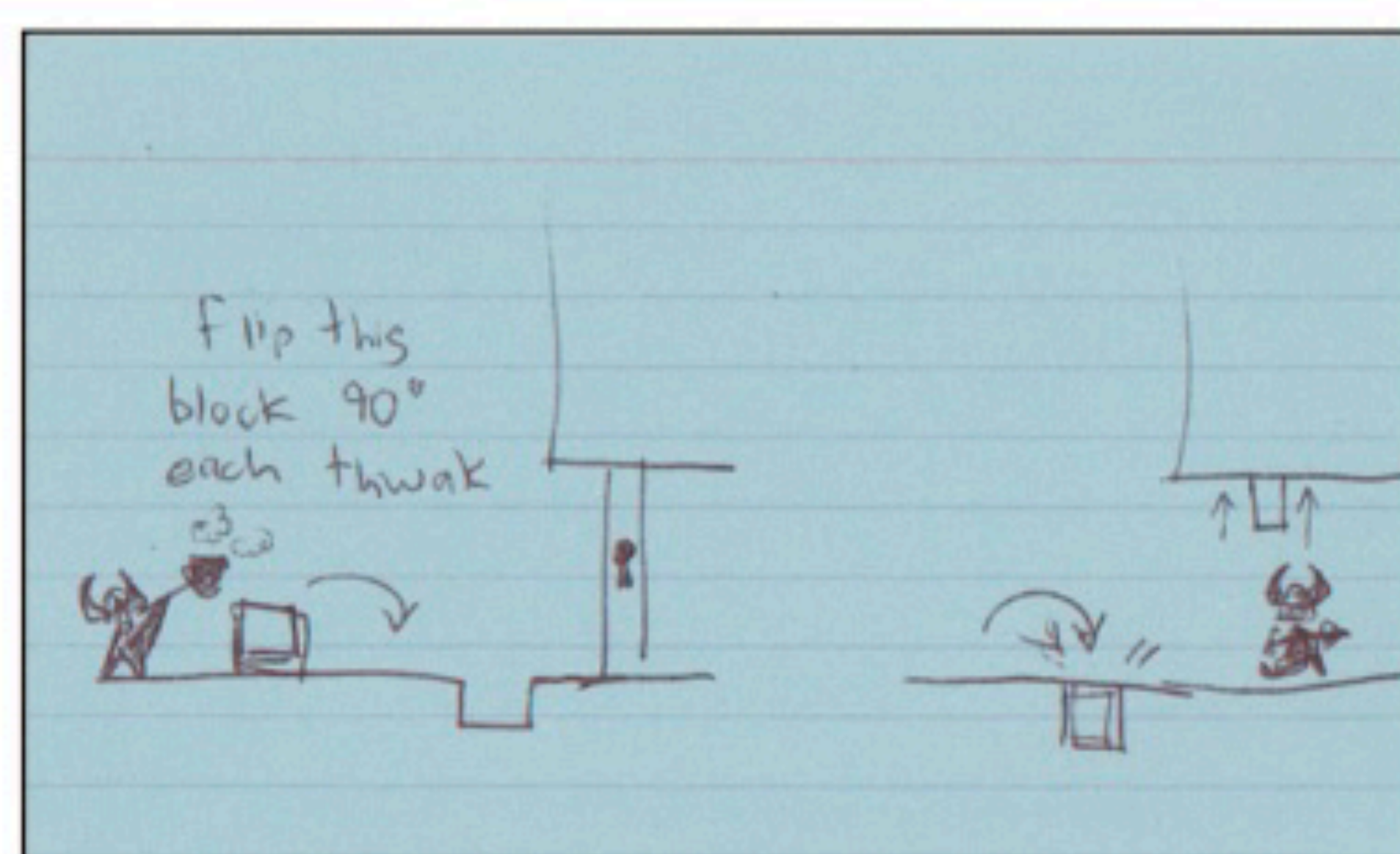
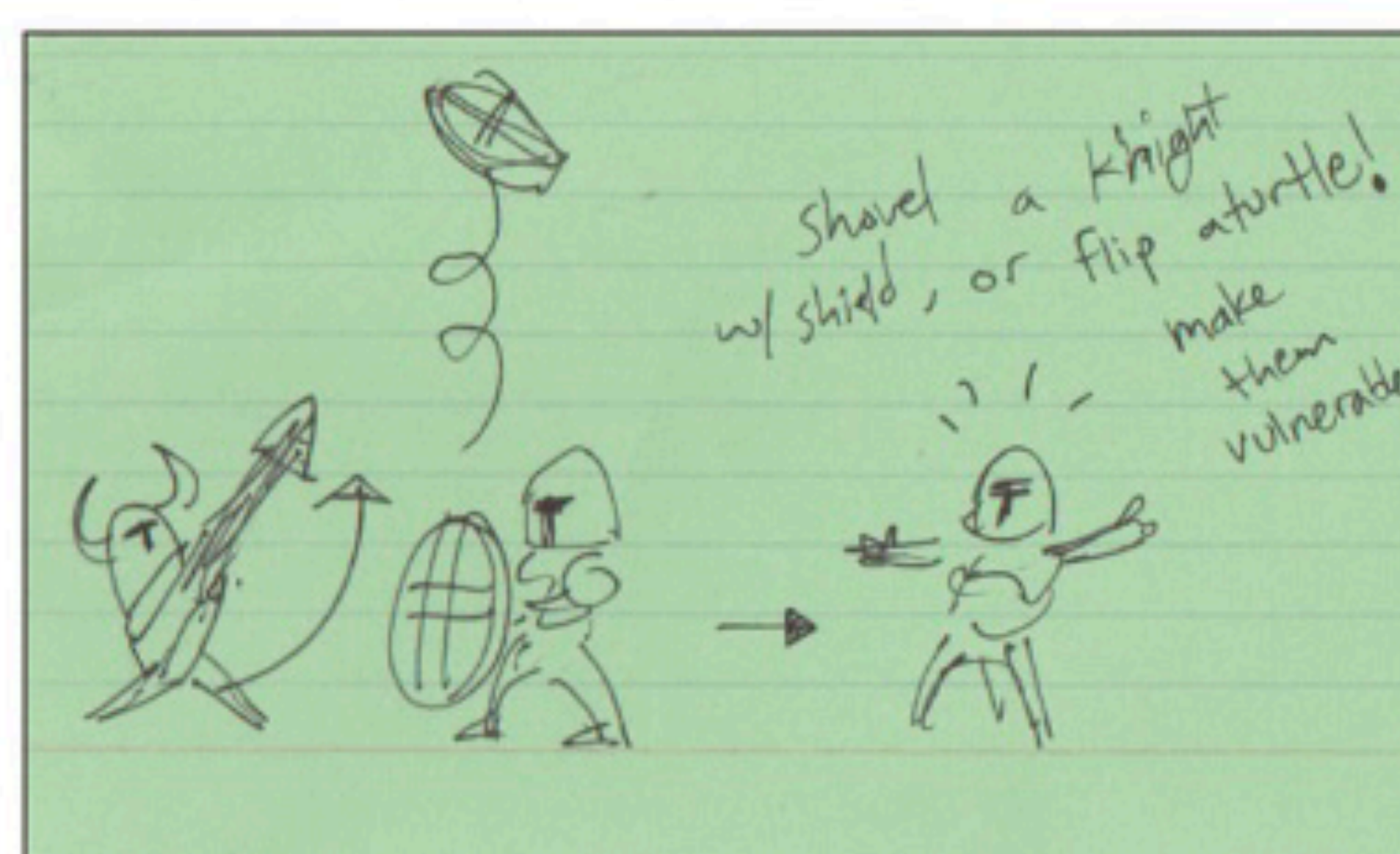
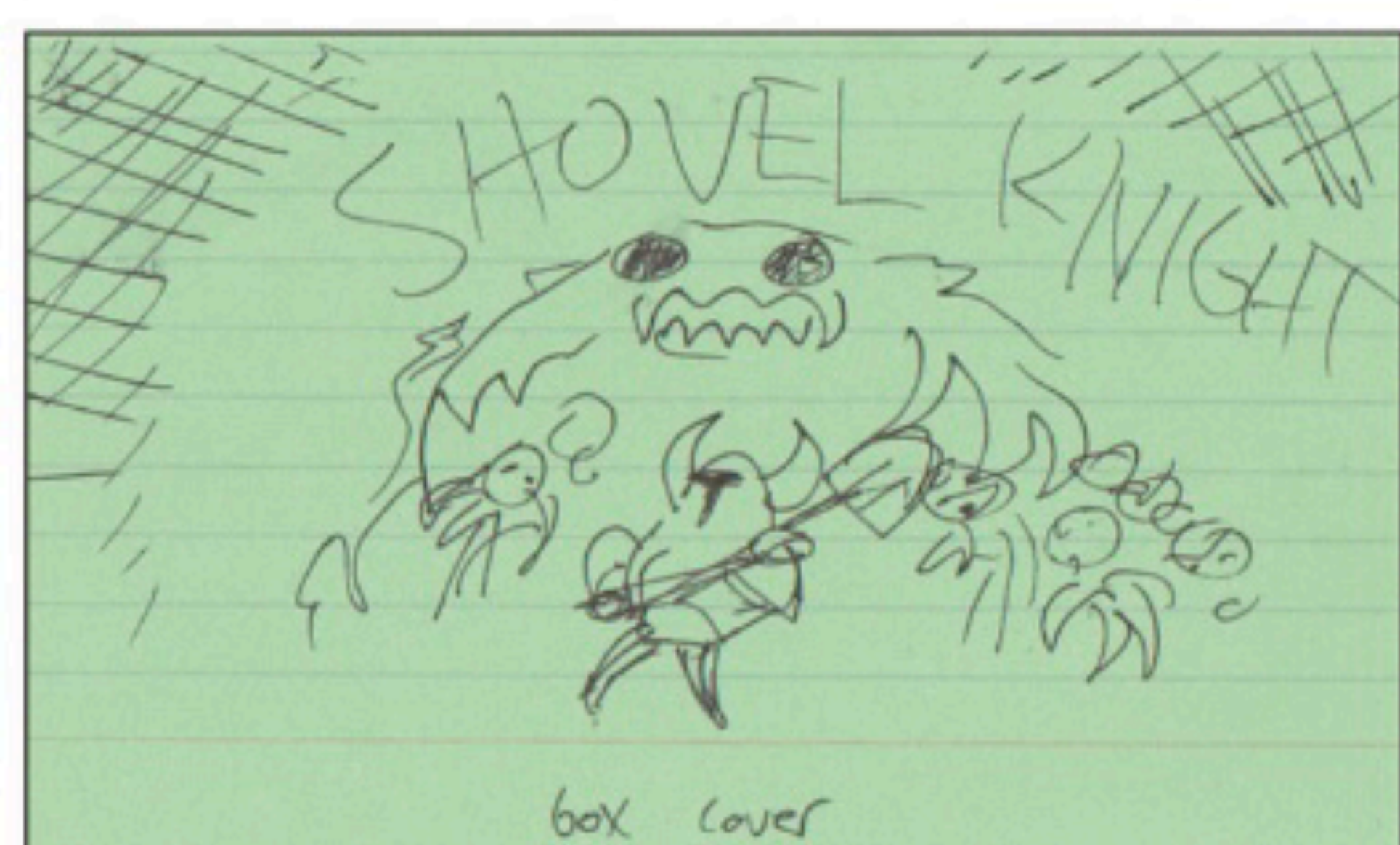
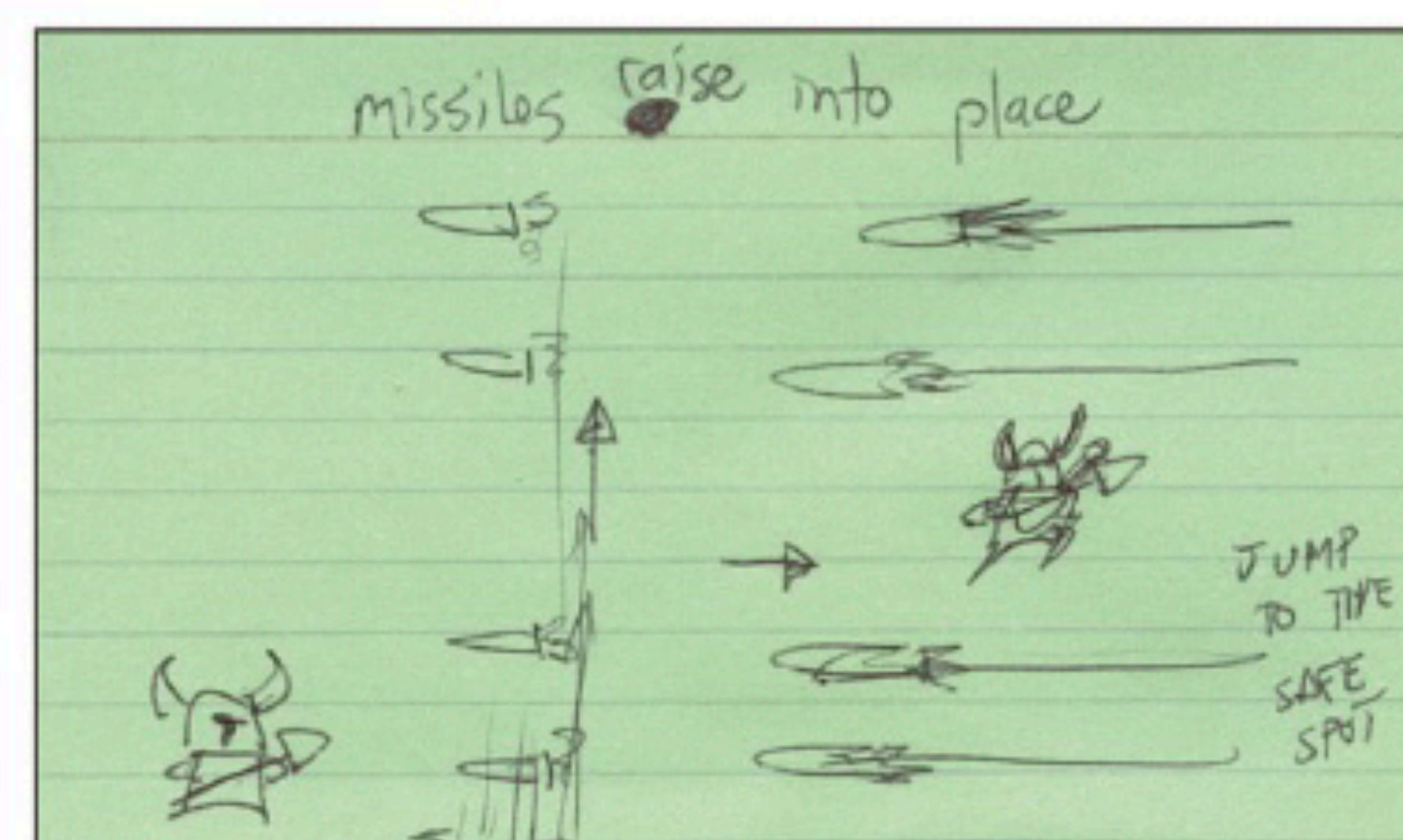
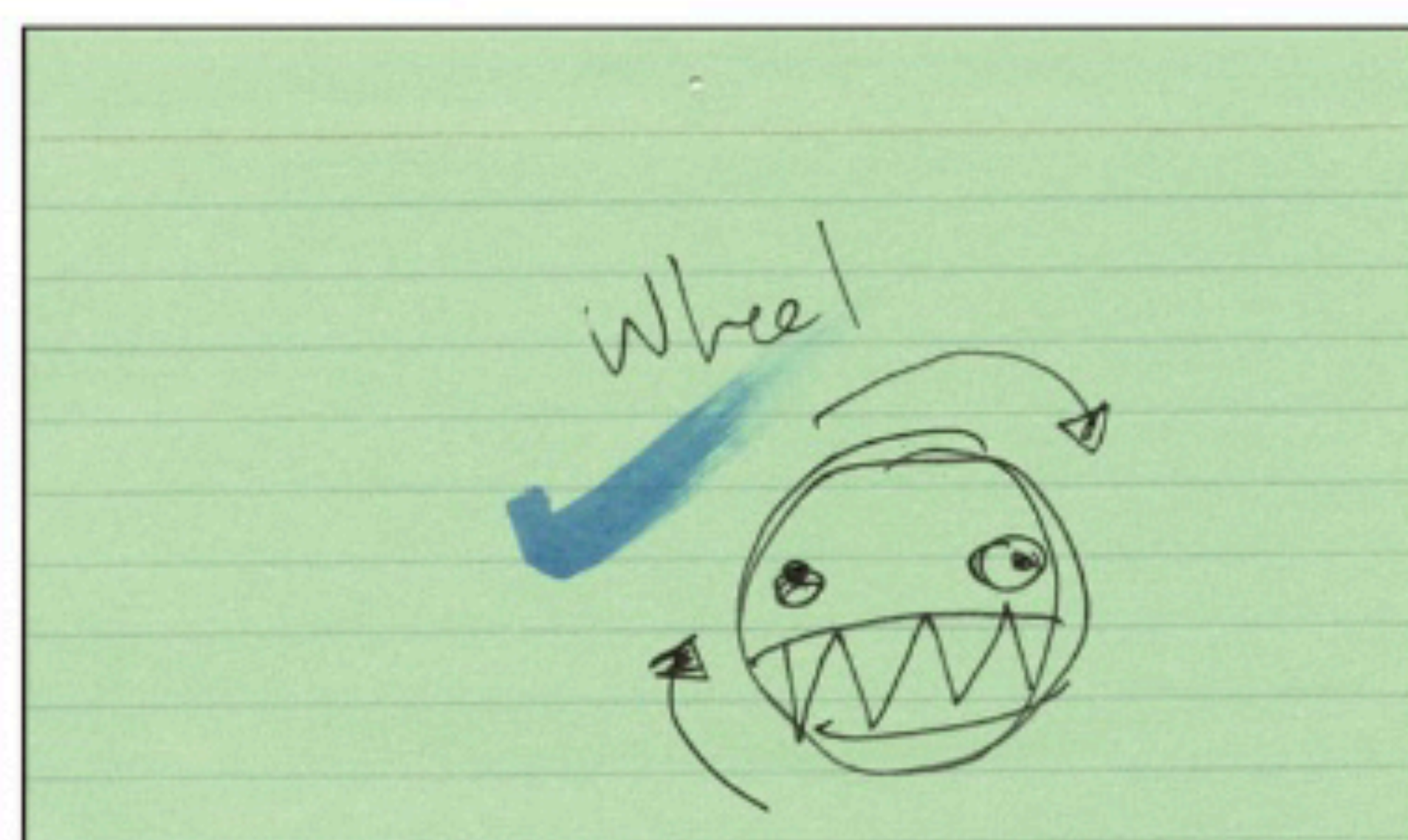
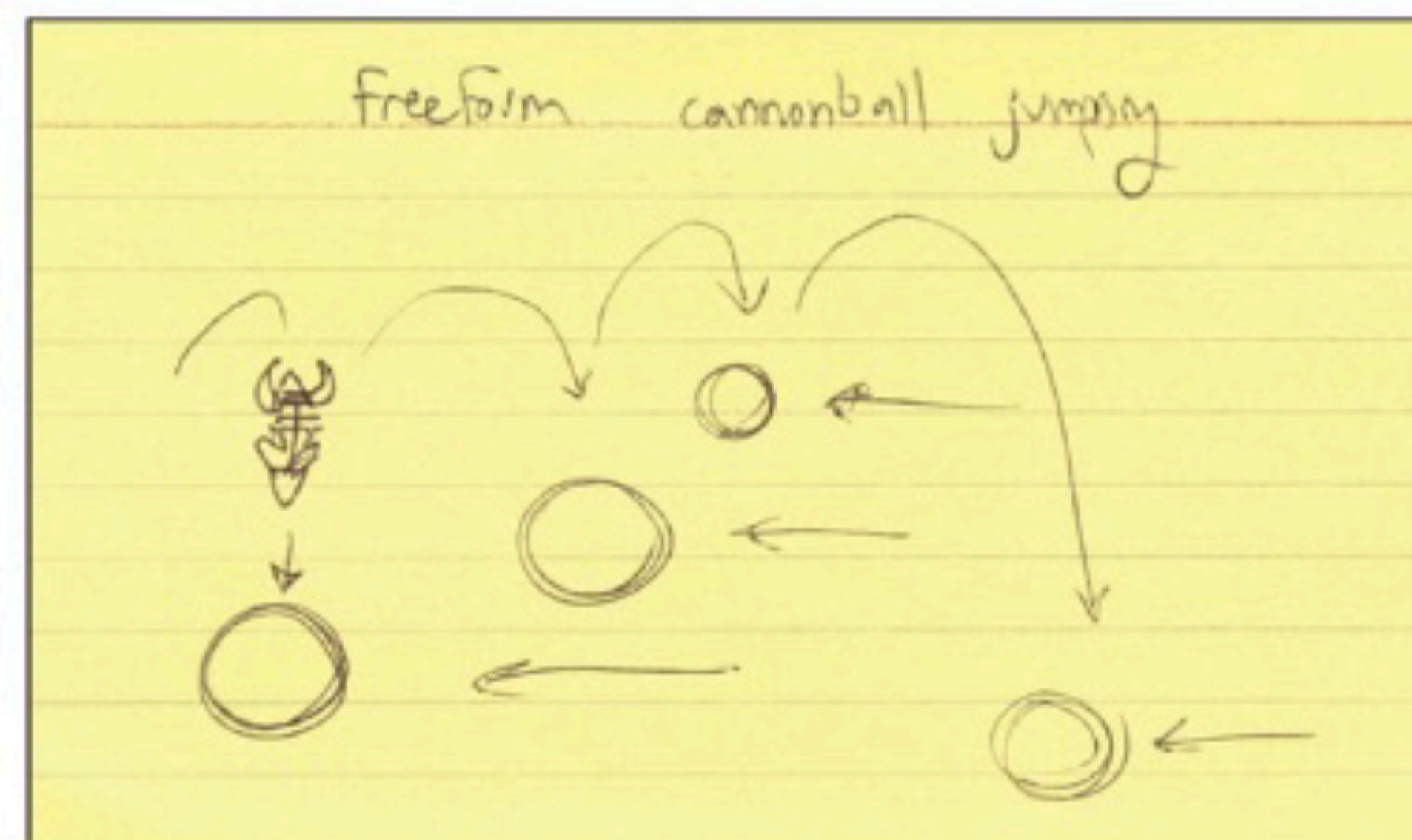
SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS





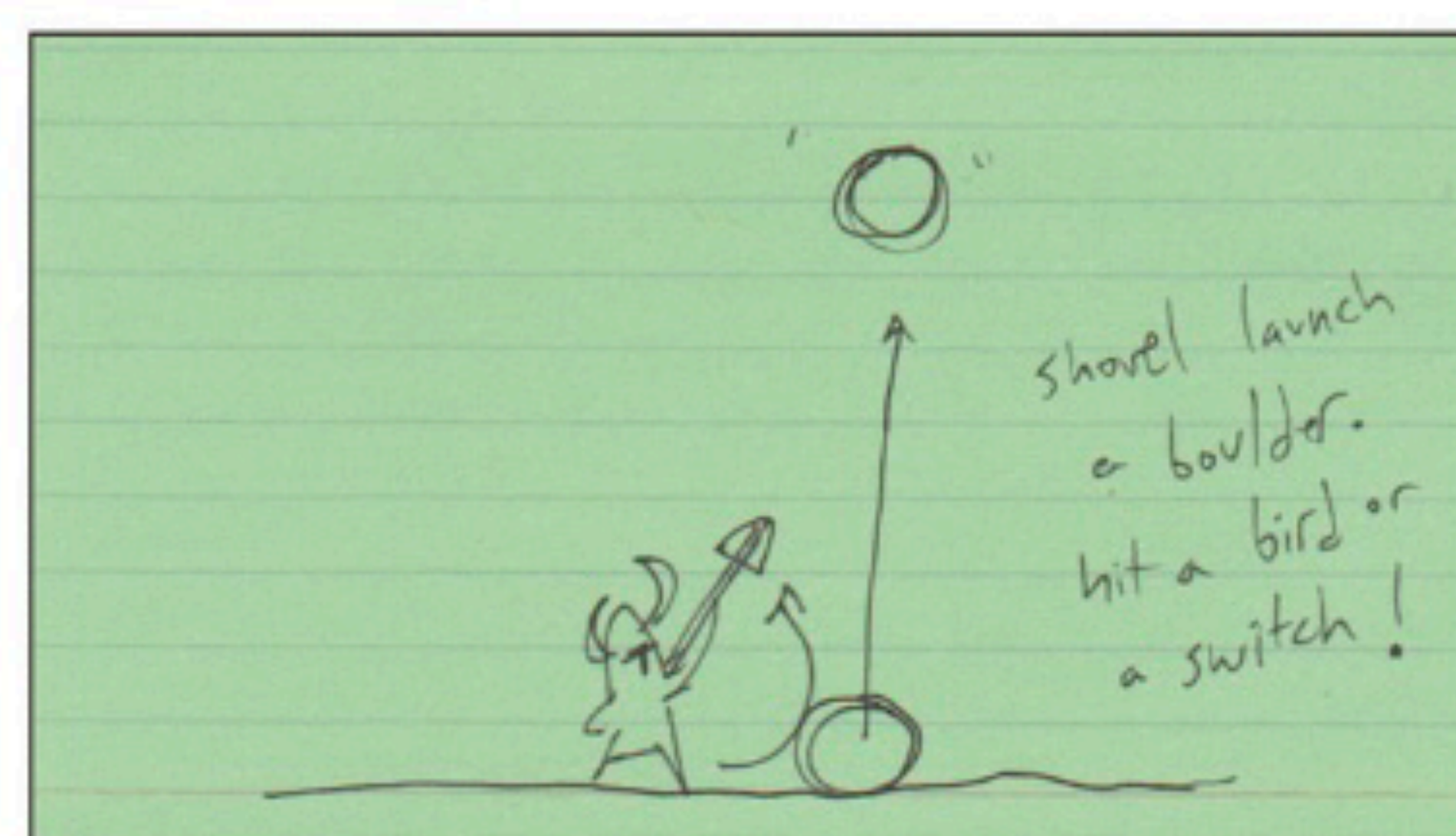
Shovel Knight II Knights!

- female knights ok
- squid knight / nautilus knight
- blacksmith knight - forges & fight @ same time
- bug knight - made armor of insect husks. kind of bugs
- barbarian / feral knight
- zeal / crusader knight
- whale knight: fat & has whale mouth face plate
- dragon knight
- steam knight: he's a robot boiler. actually a robot



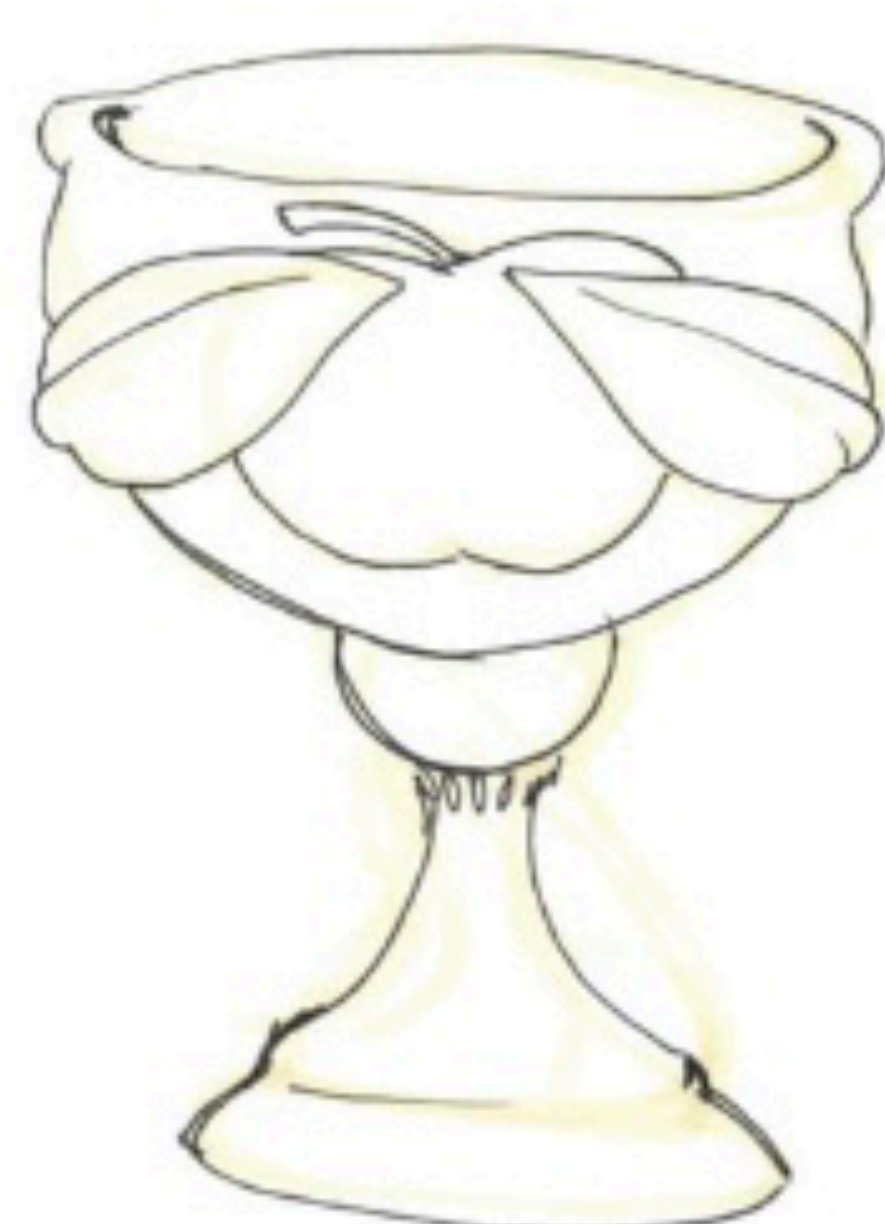
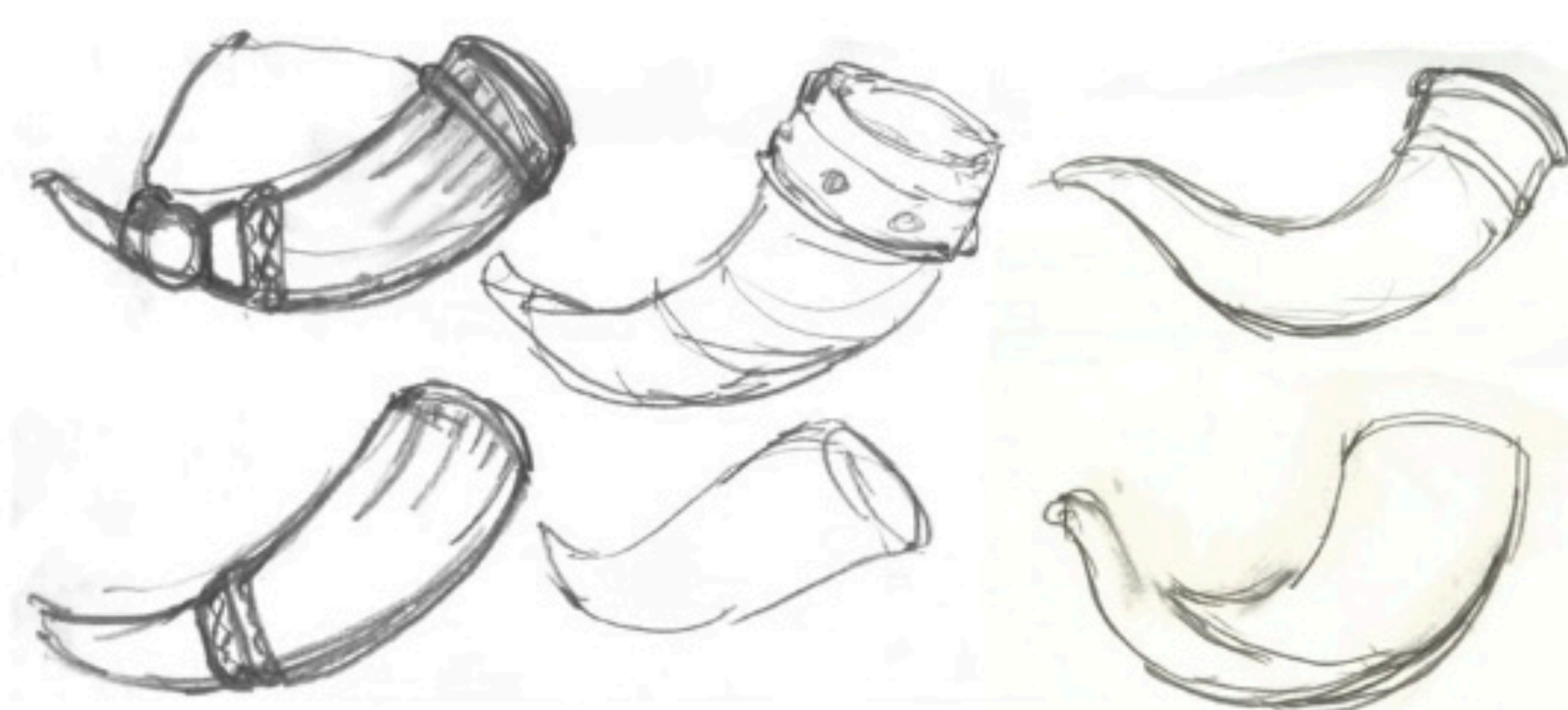
## DEV. COMMENTARY

A lot of times we would use sketches on index cards to get across simple gameplay concepts or visual designs.





# RELICS, ITEMS, AND OBJECTS



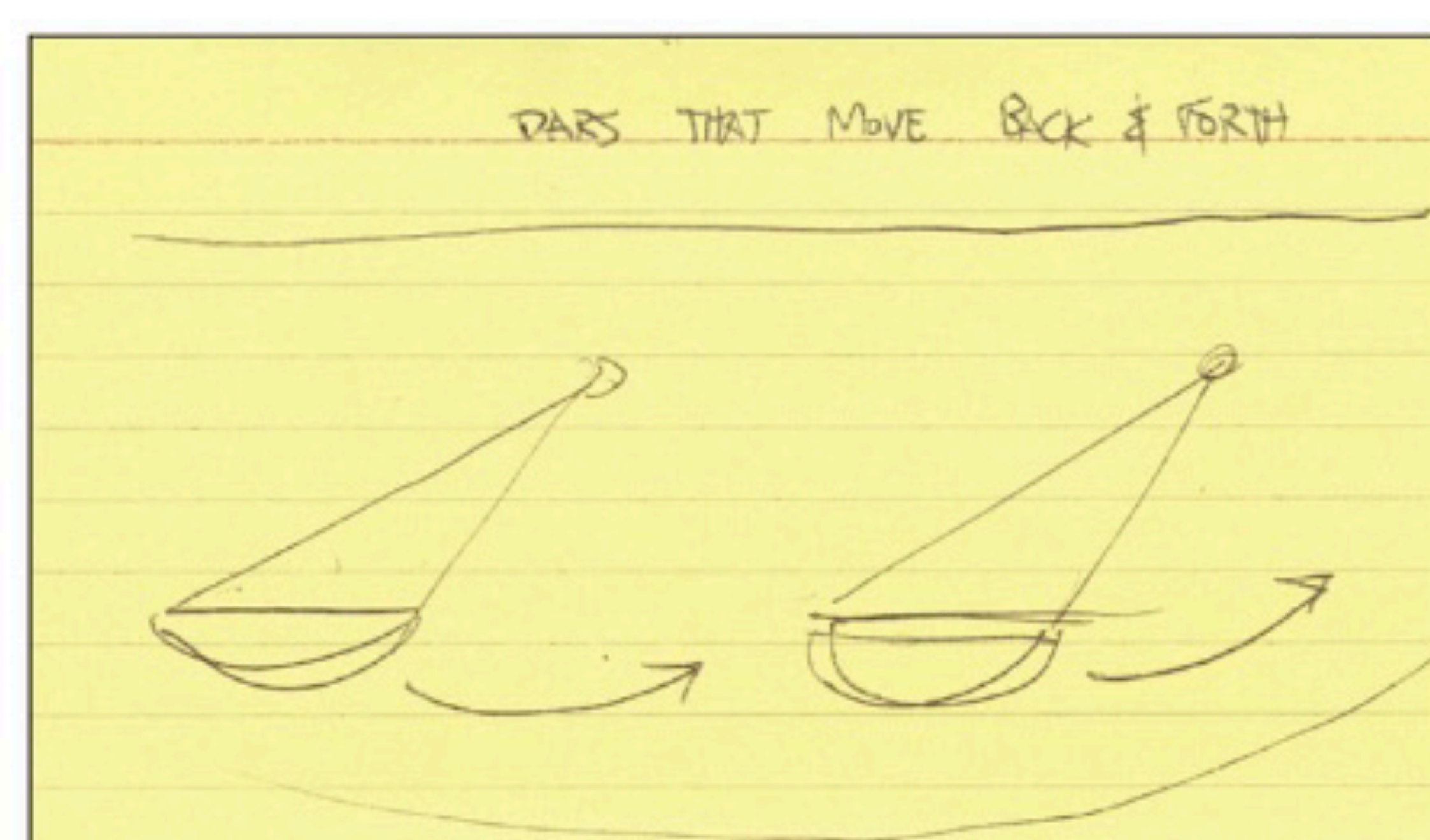
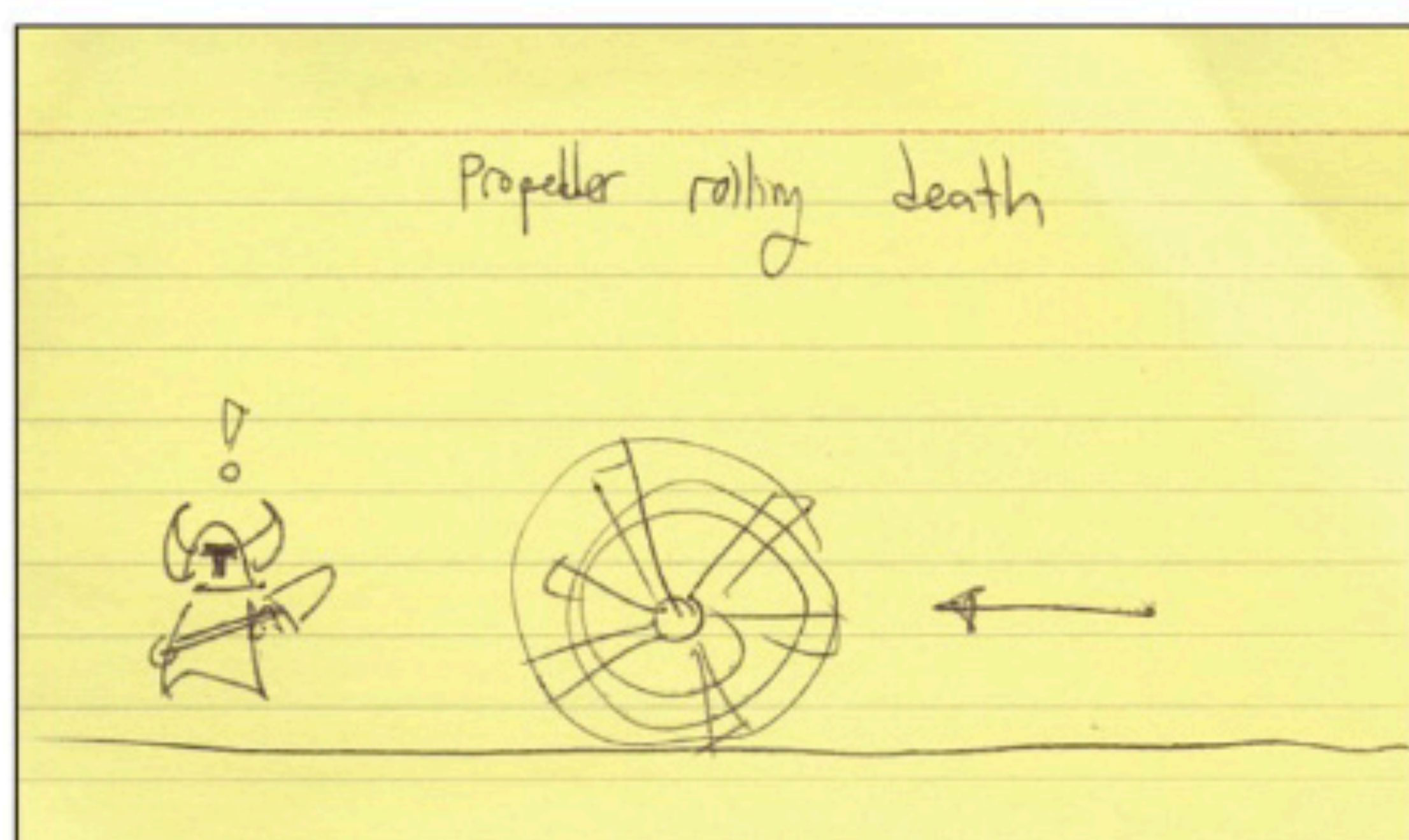
"Trophy"



"Trophy"



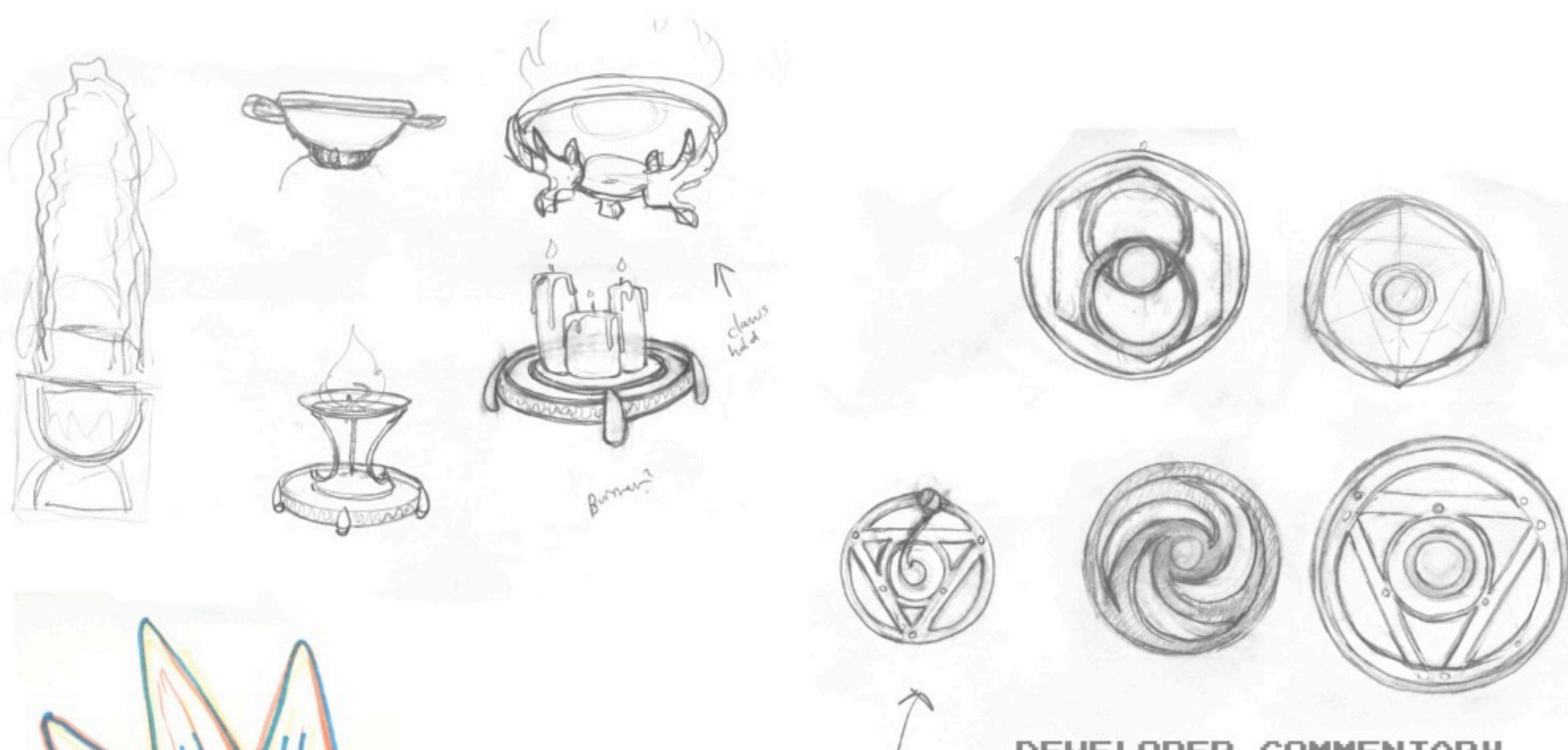
"Trophy"



SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS

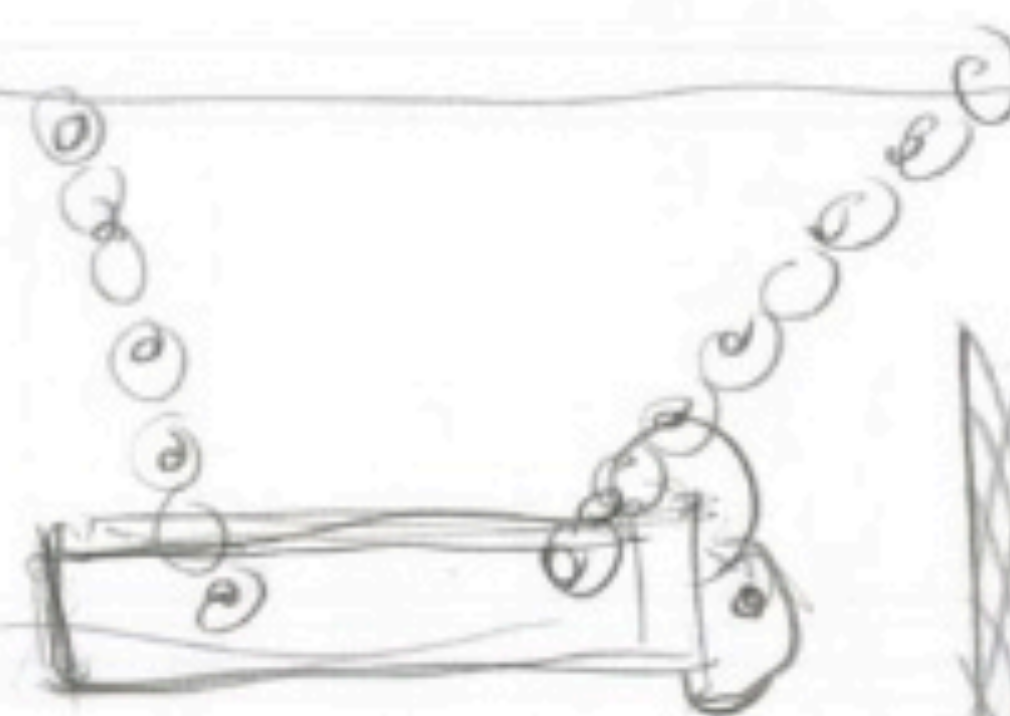
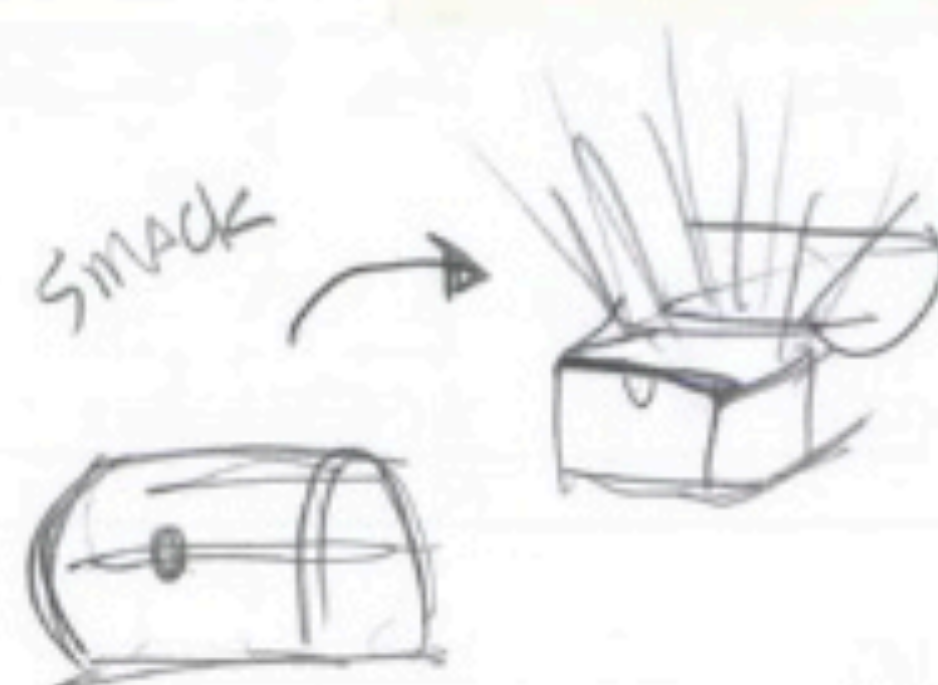
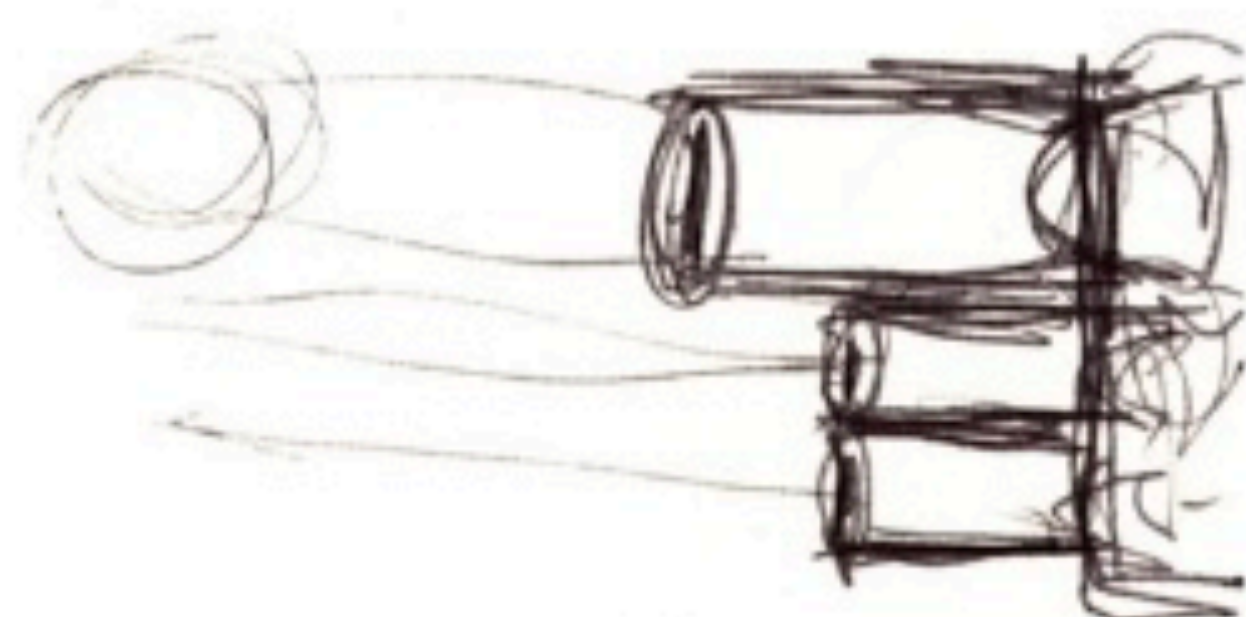
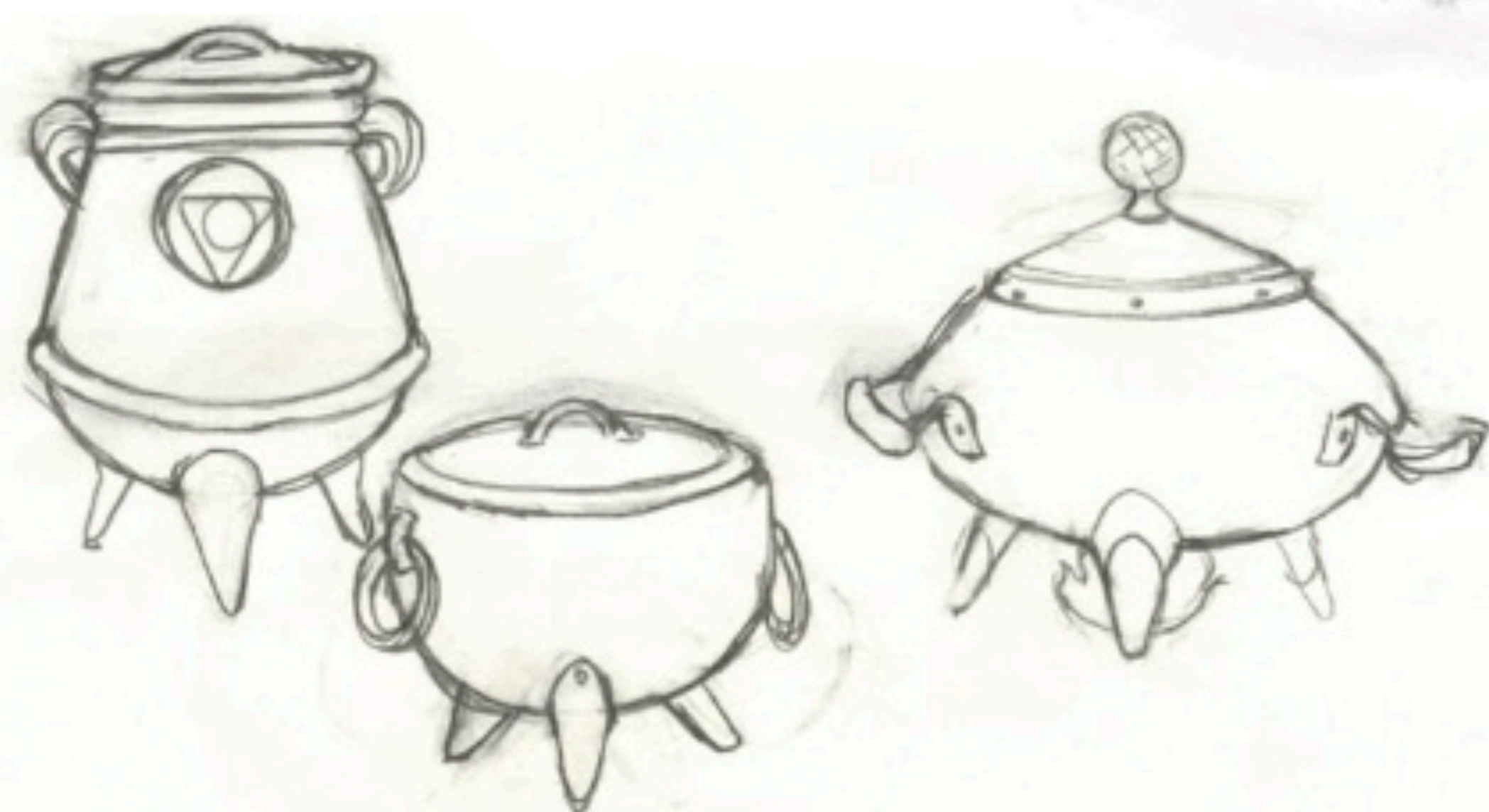






#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

These are designs for a crank object that was only used in one place in the final game. But even so, we iterated a lot on the details.



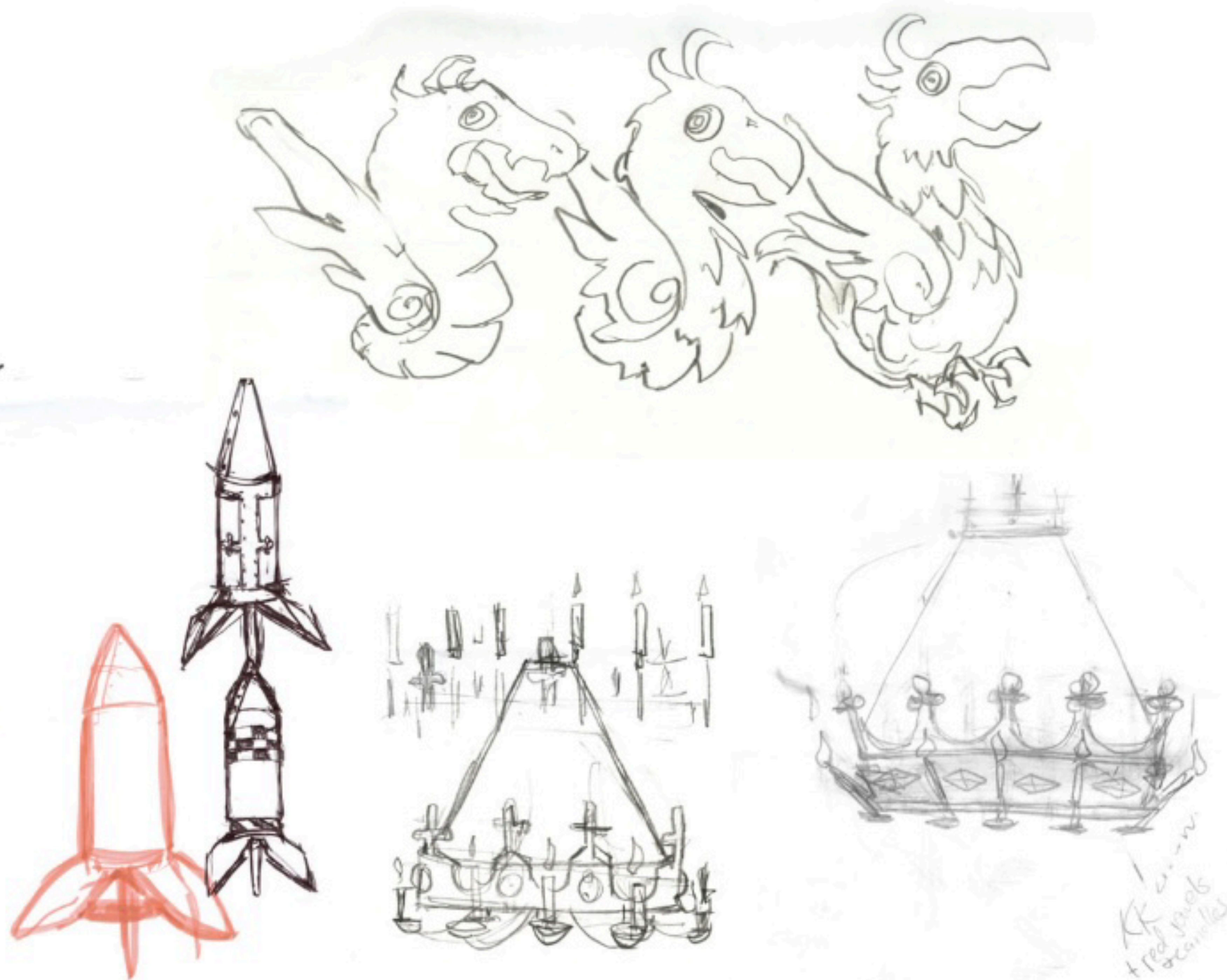
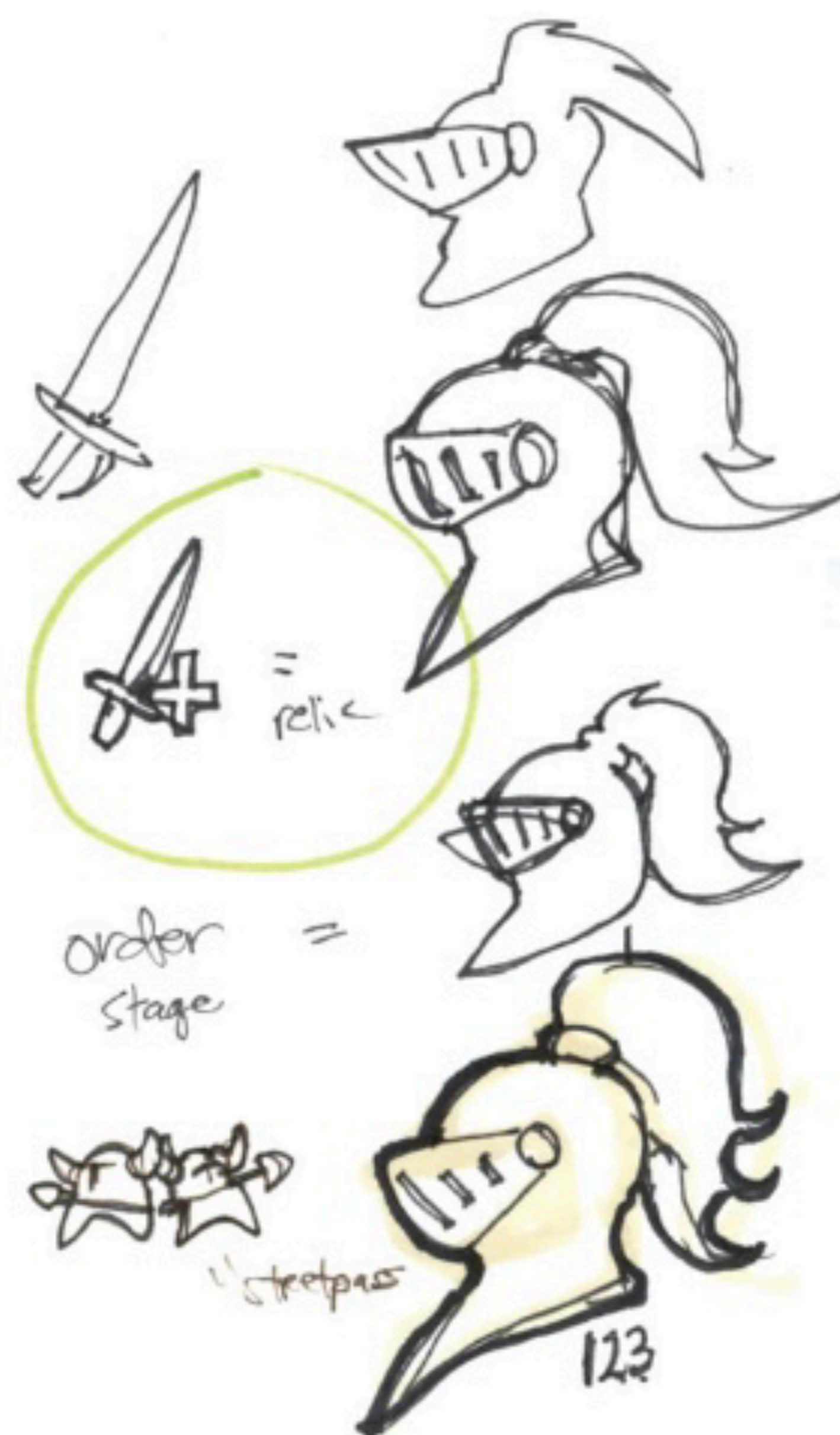


# RELICS, ITEMS, AND OBJECTS (CONTINUED)



## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

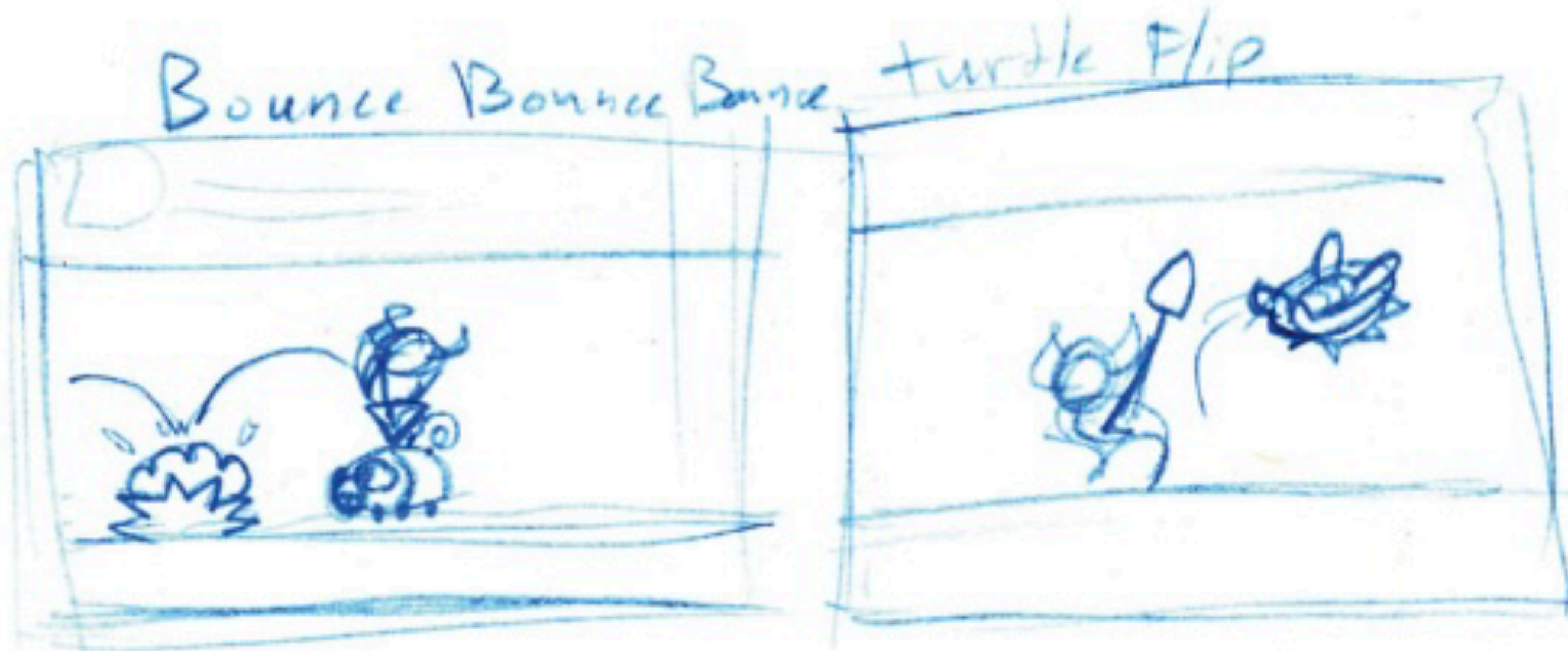
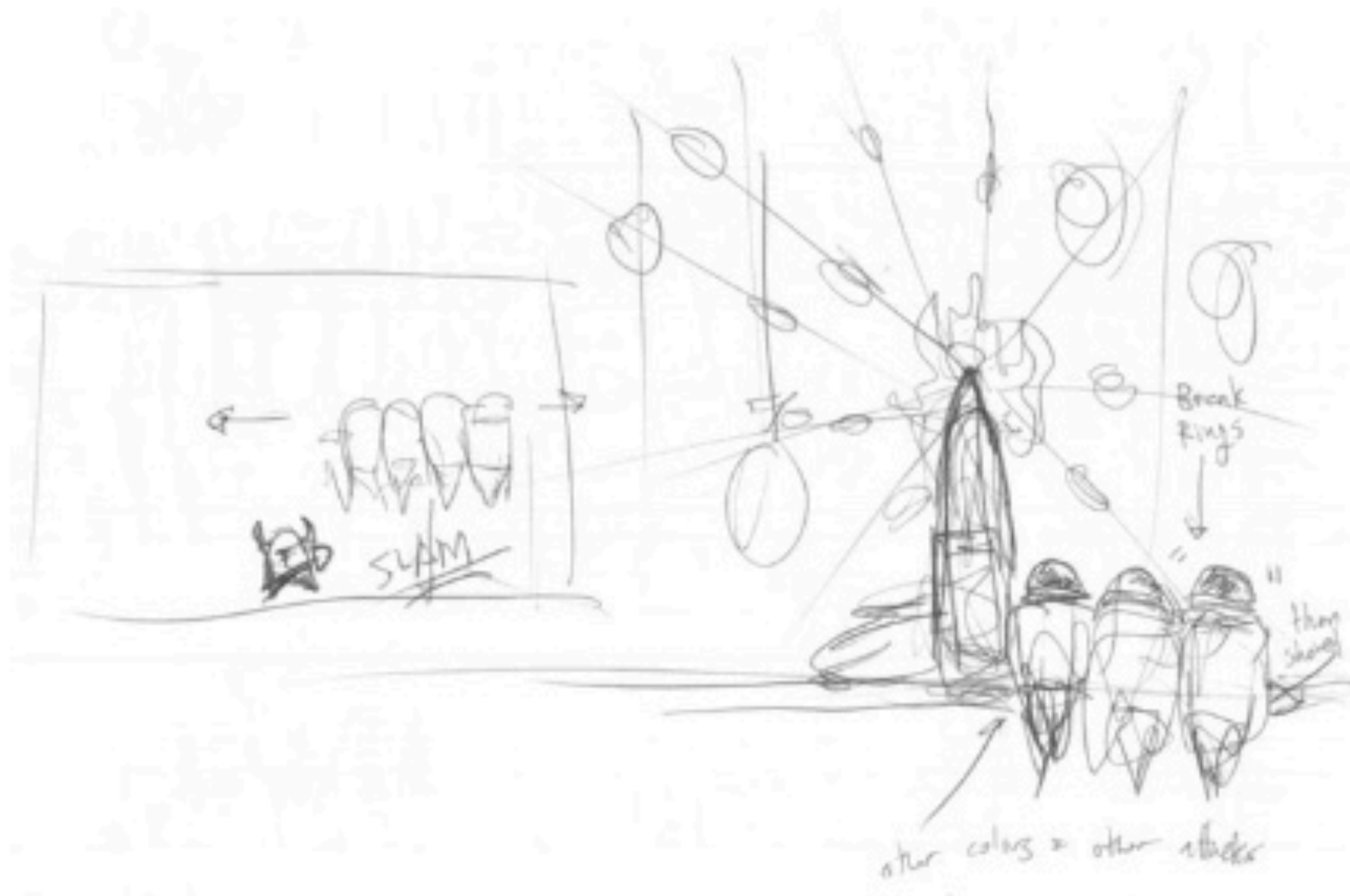
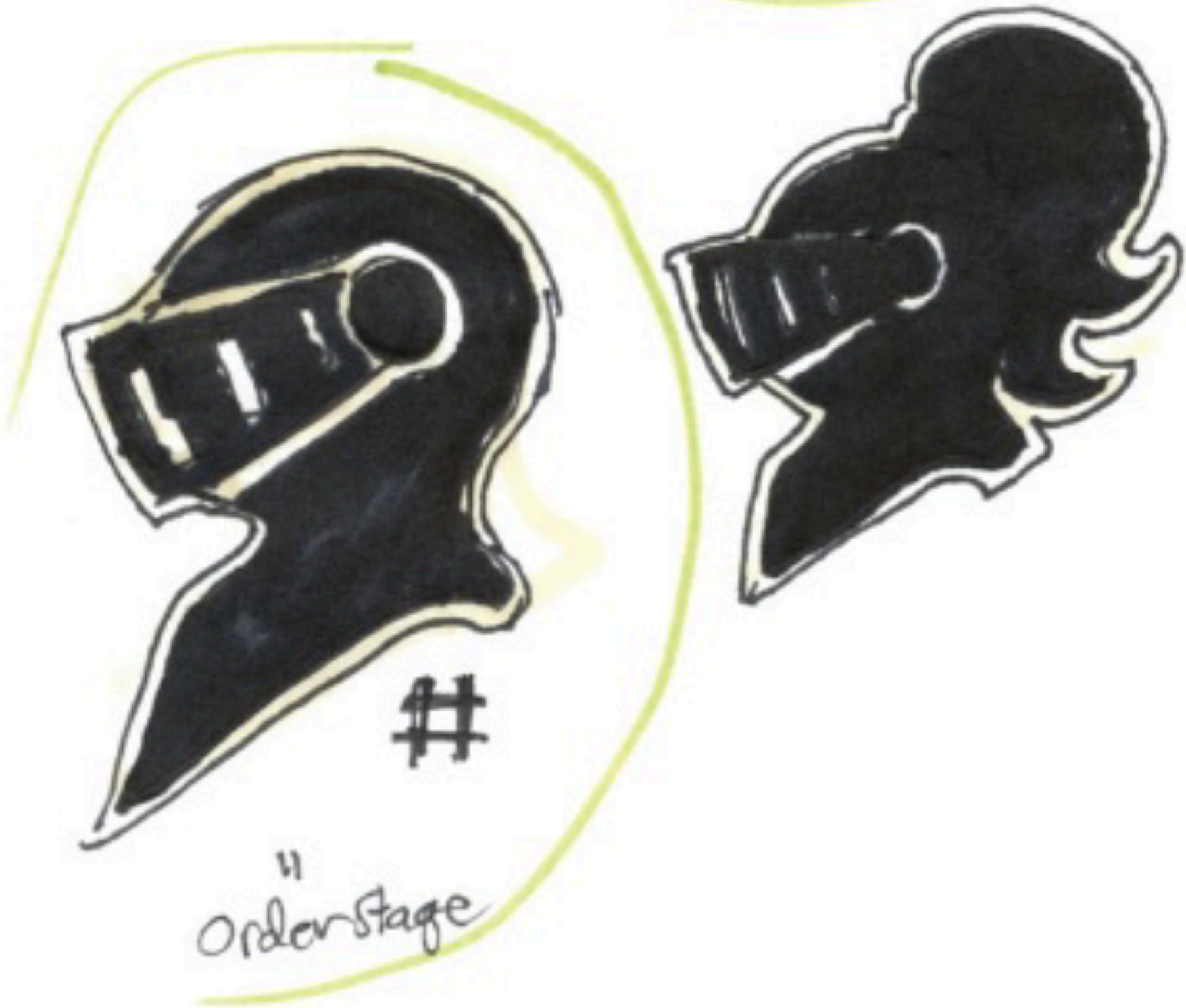
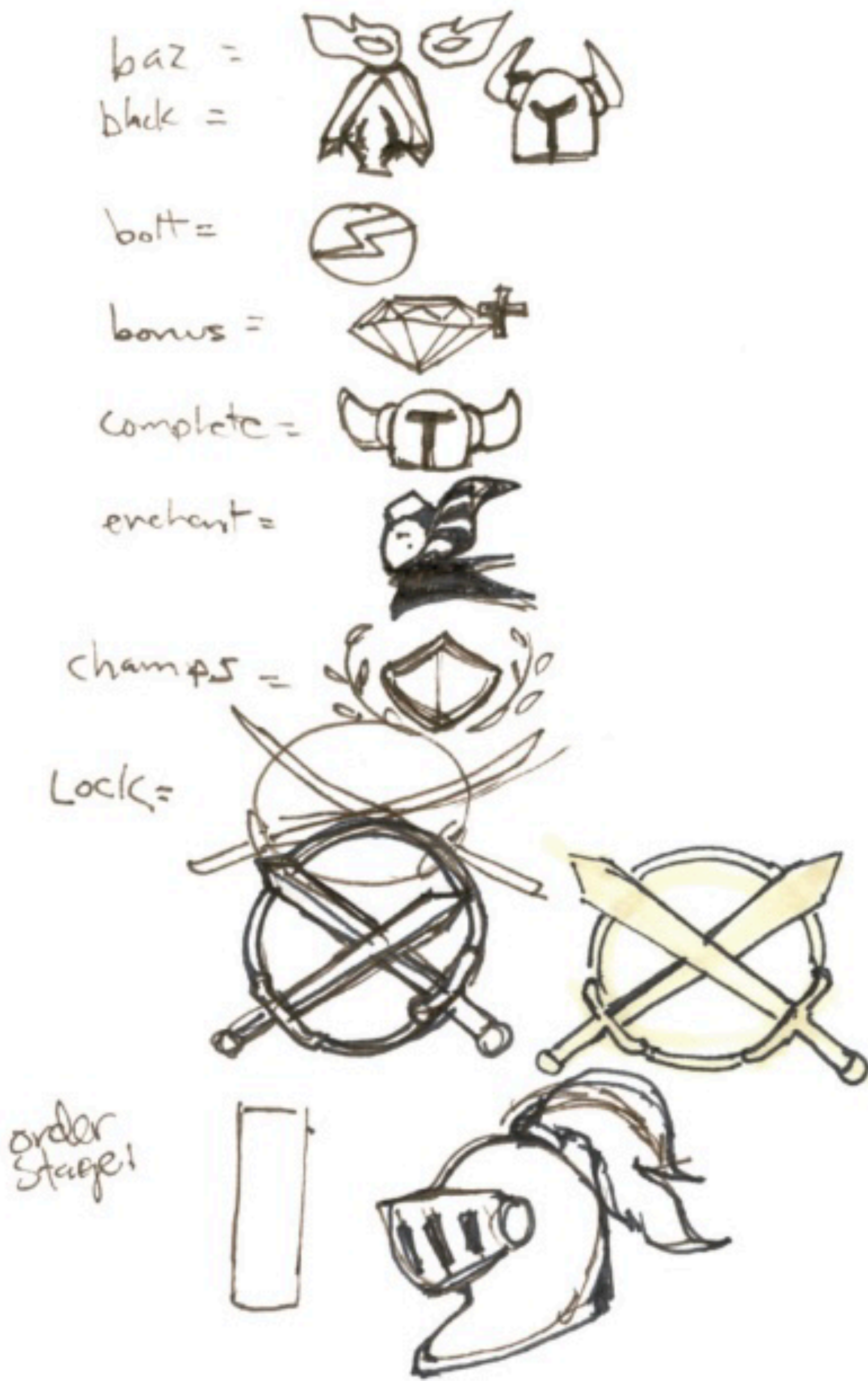
Checkpoints were invisible initially. Later, they became objects that you had to pay to activate. Eventually we ended on a design where you could see the value of the gems inside the globe.





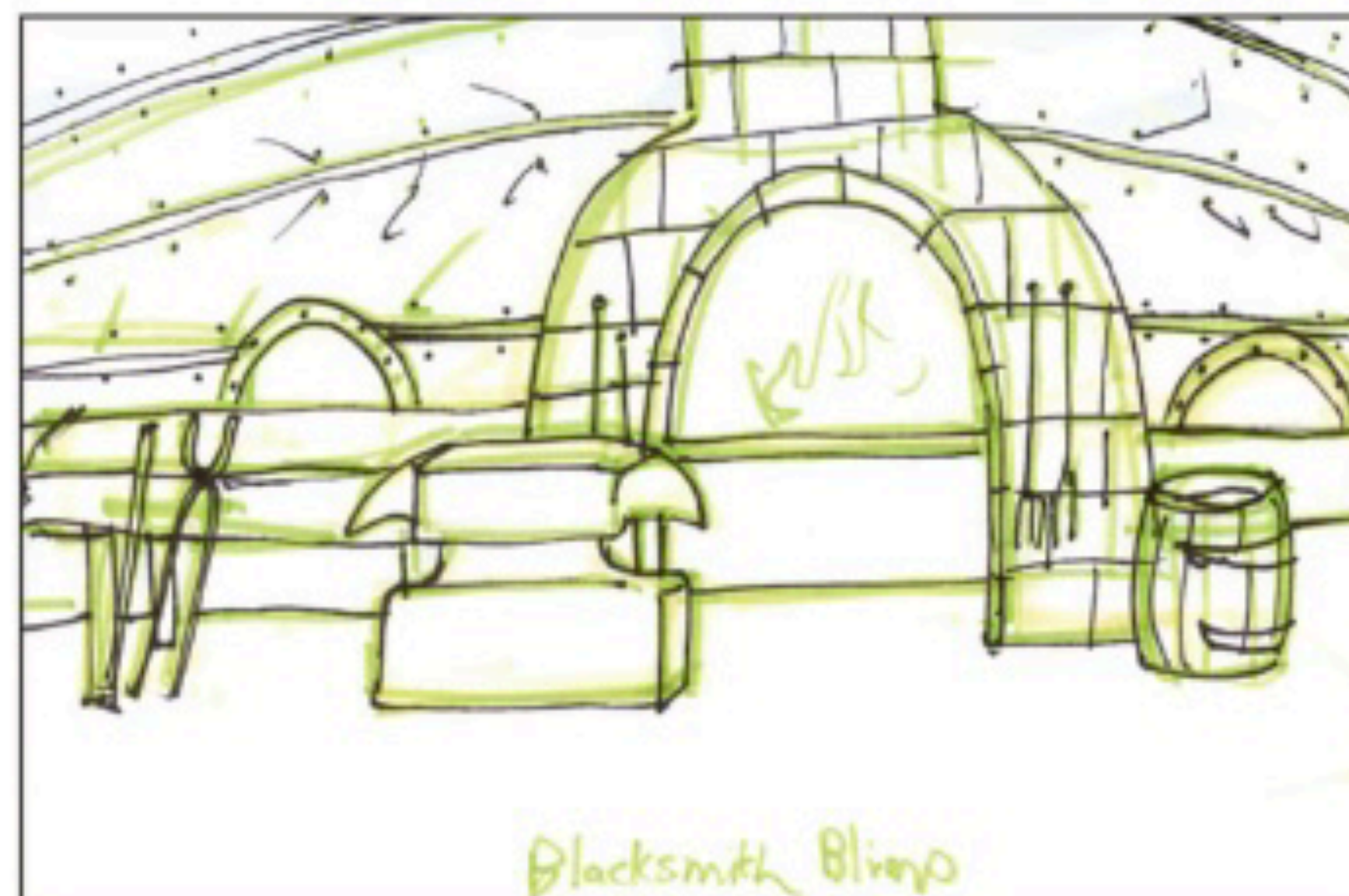
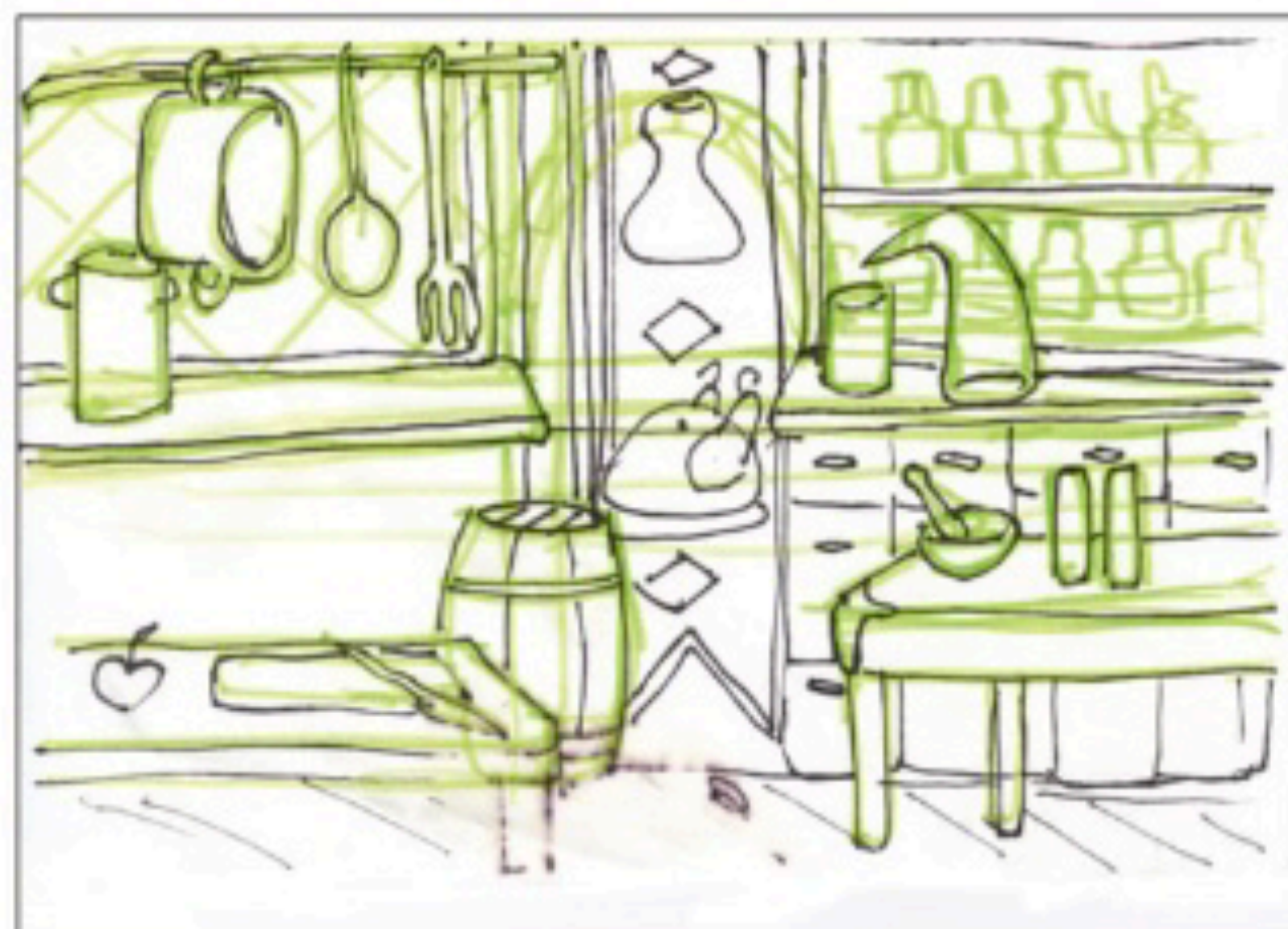
## MINOR CONCEPTS

Here are some early map icons.

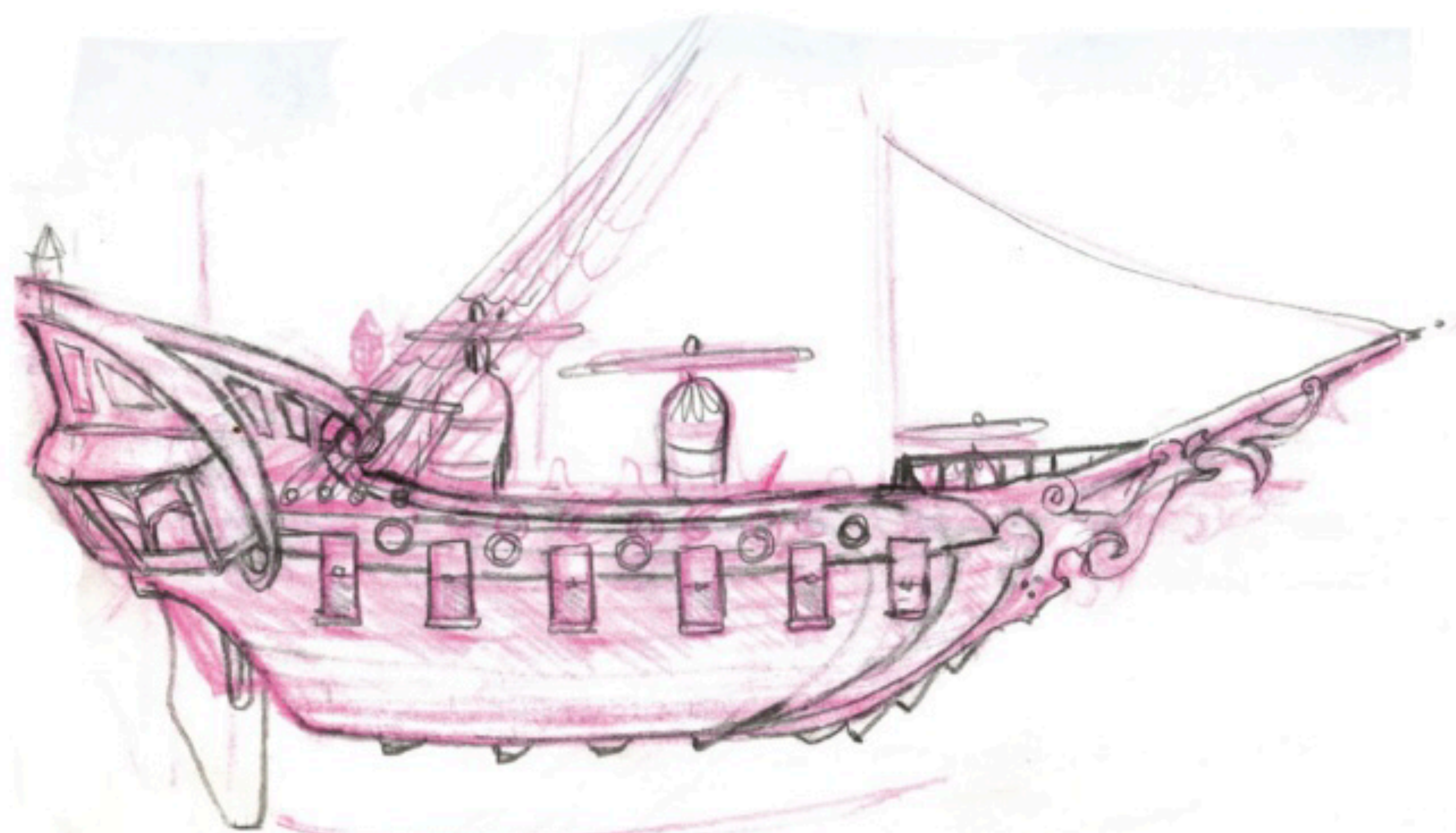
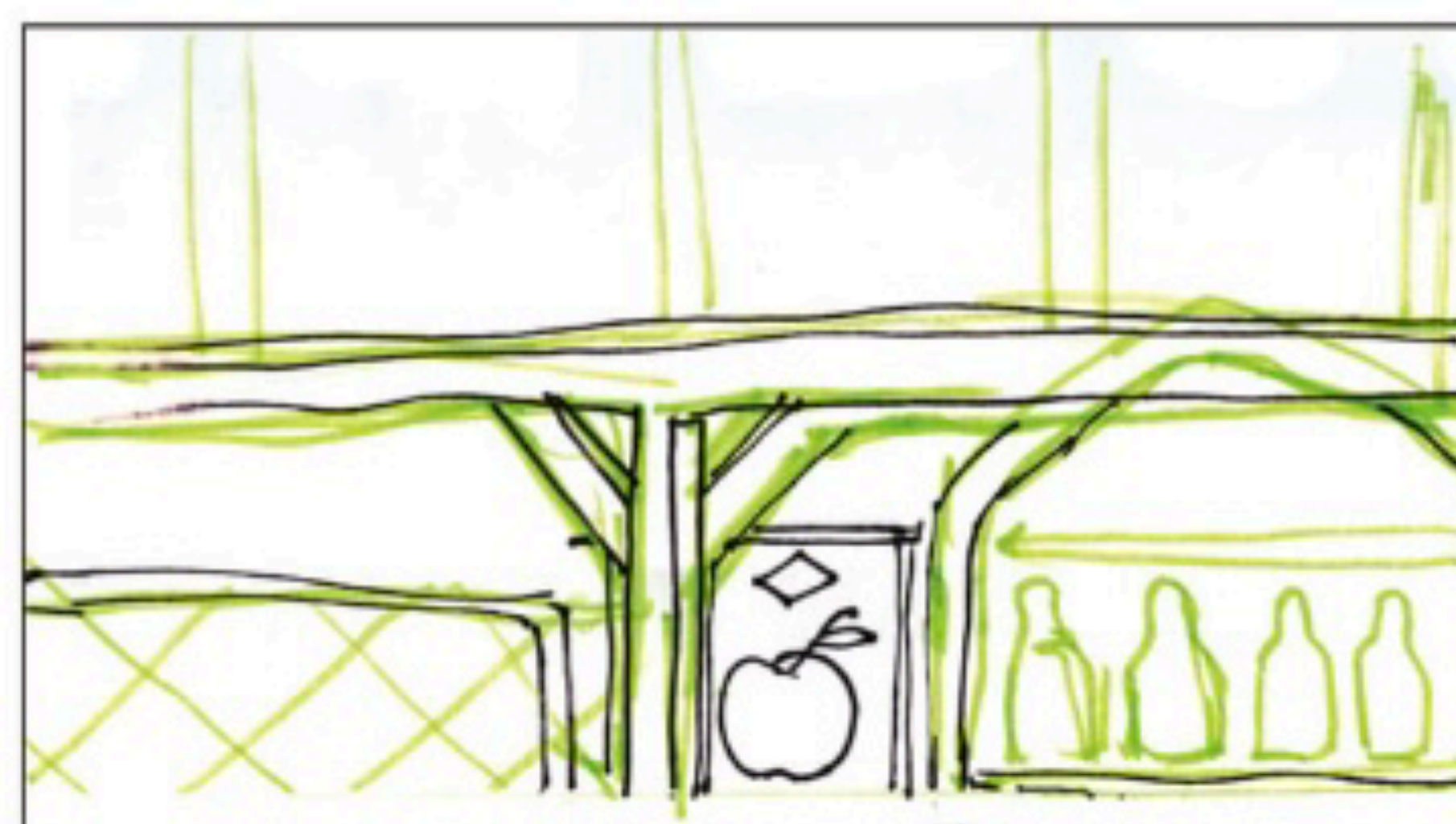
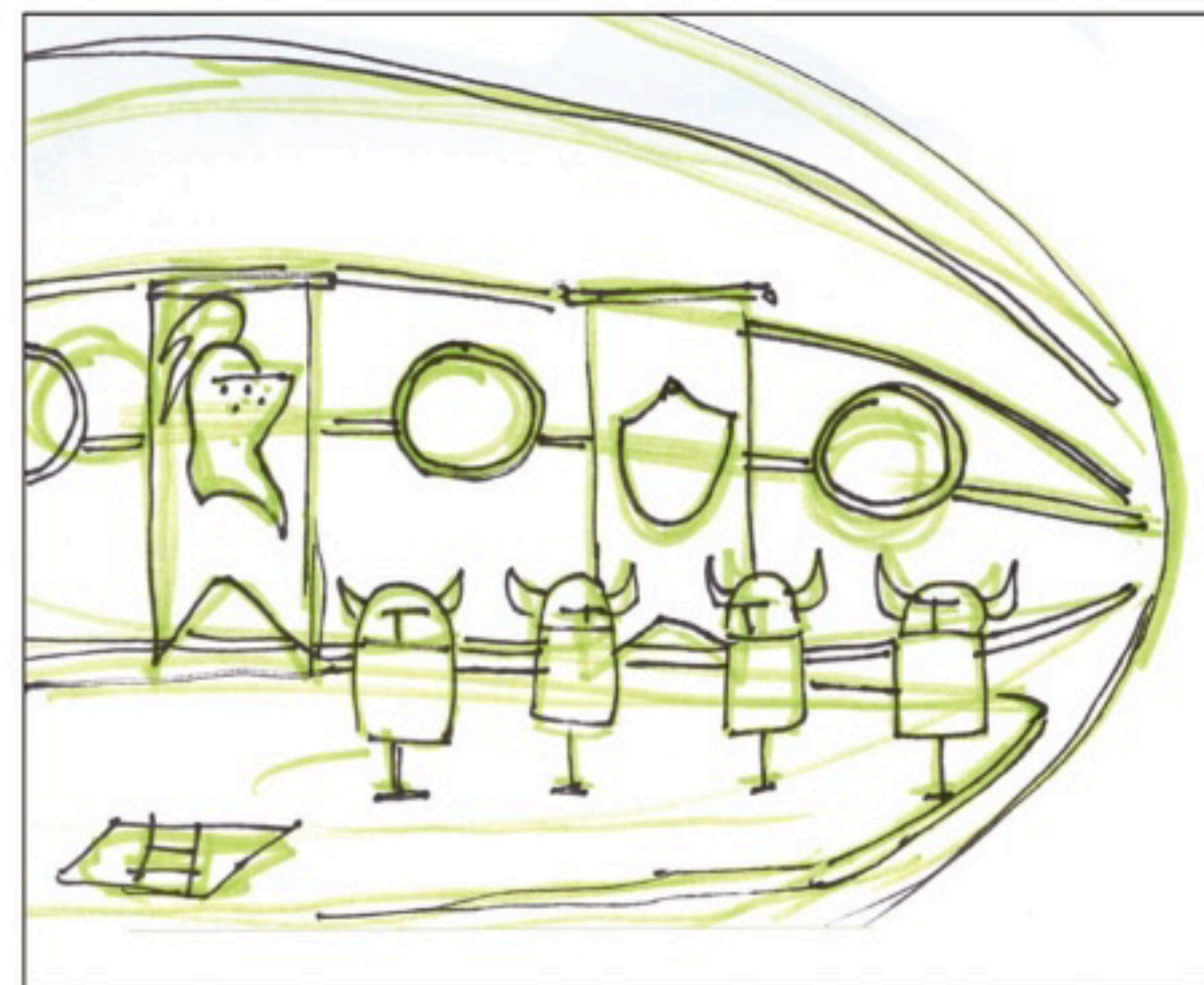
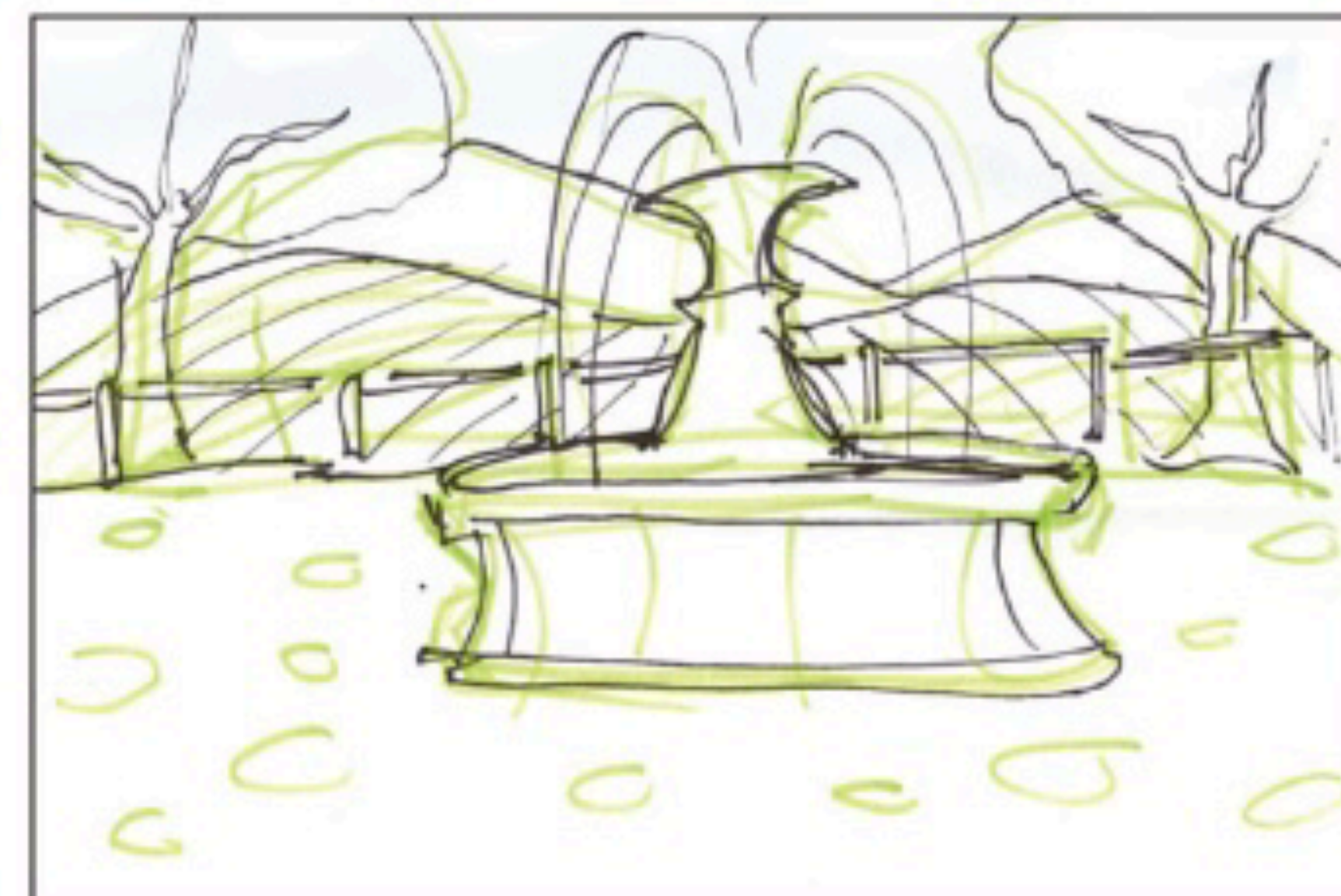




# ENVIRONMENTS



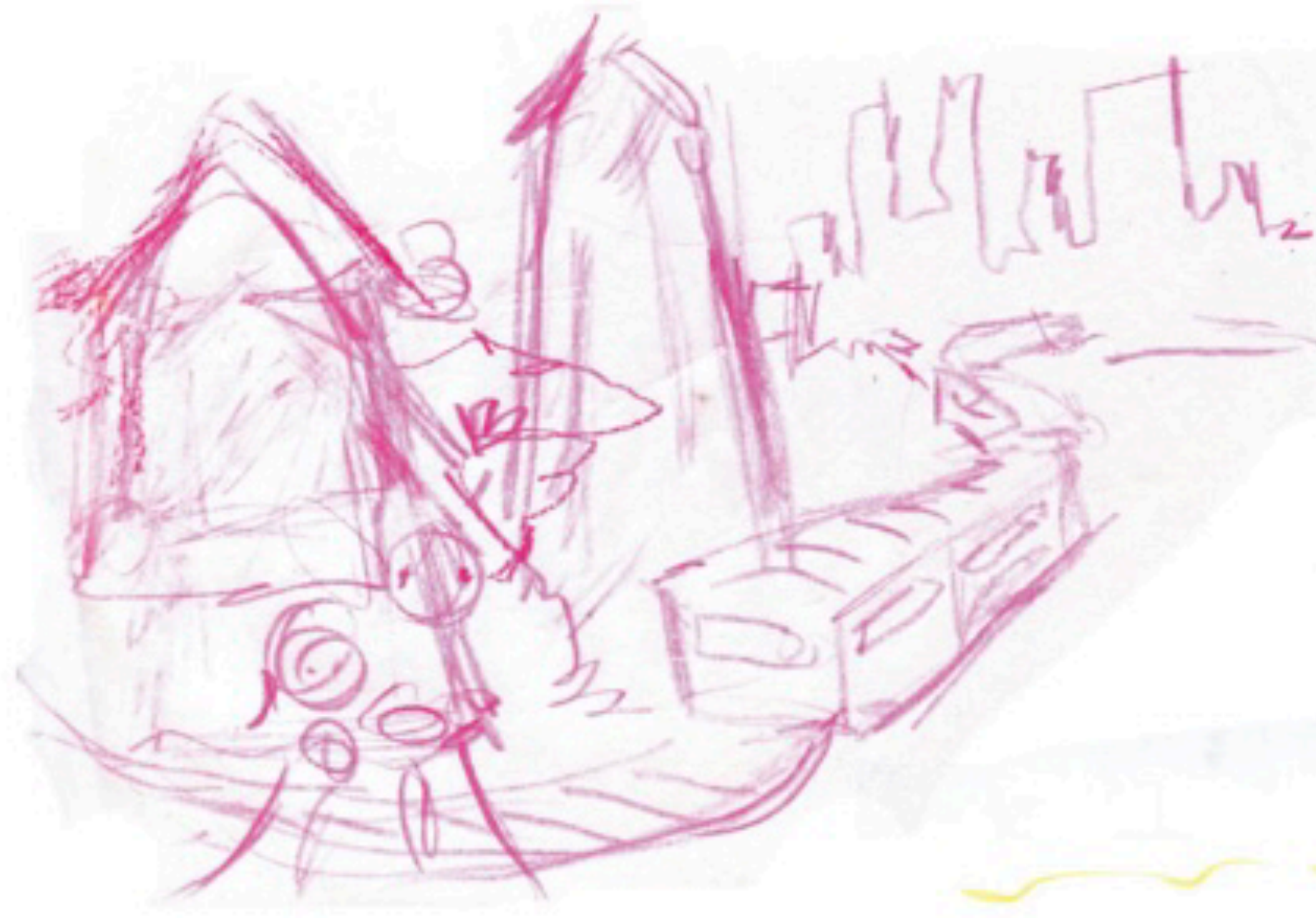
Blacksmith Blimp



SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS







#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We didn't do a lot of environment concepts for the game, but we did for showpieces like the Troupple Pond and the Tower of Fate.





## UNUSED CONCEPTS



### DEV. COMMENTARY

We thought it would be super cool if Shovel Knight had a giant warhog as a steed. Wouldn't it be fun to see the "Pig Hog" in the future?



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

This "turtle" was our earliest enemy concept. You'd flip him over, then stab his belly! He didn't make it into the final game.



Pig Hog



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We wanted to have a giant boss where you would fight only their hands - that's an NES classic. Since we didn't have a stage to put him in, though, we didn't end up using these concepts.



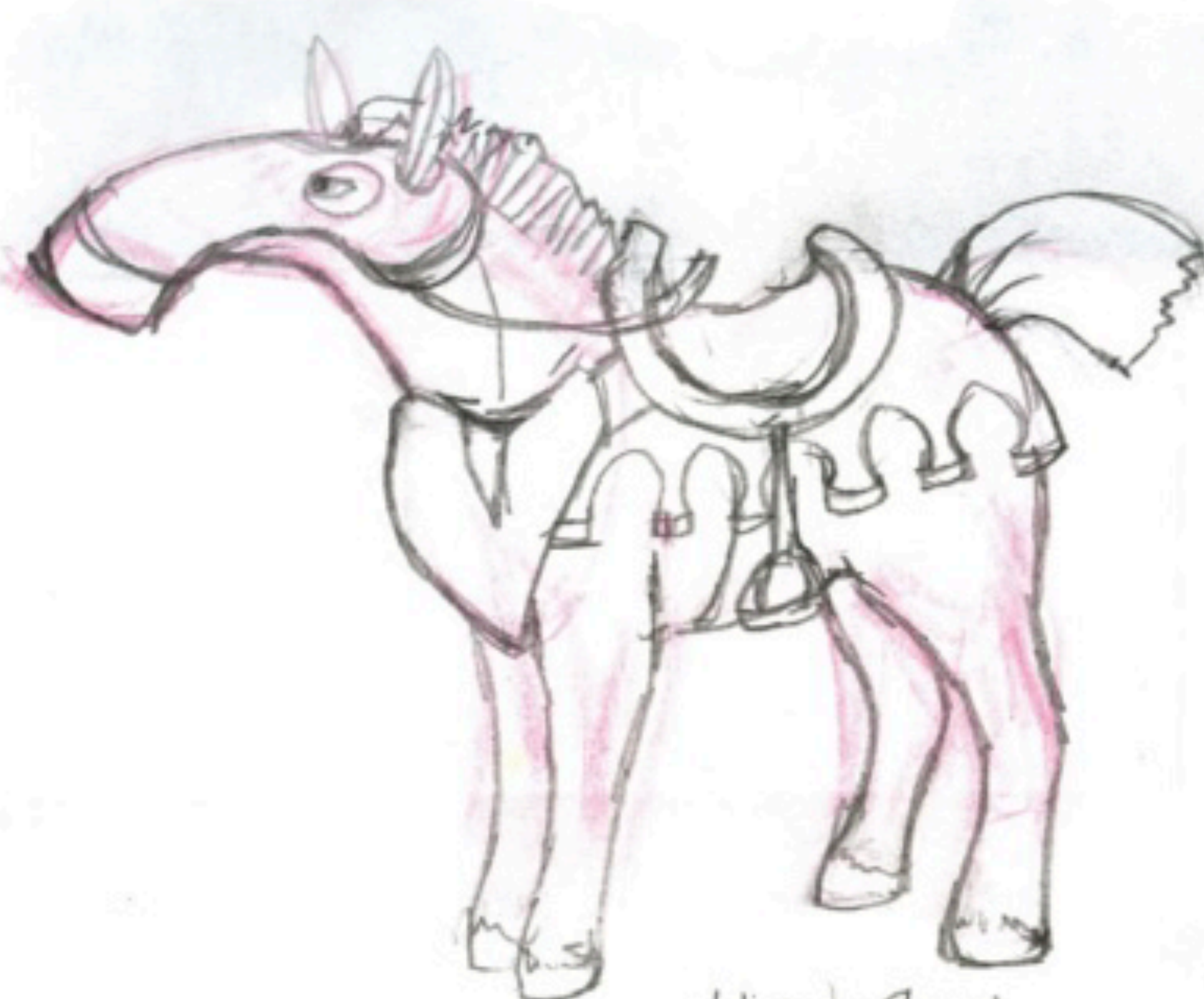




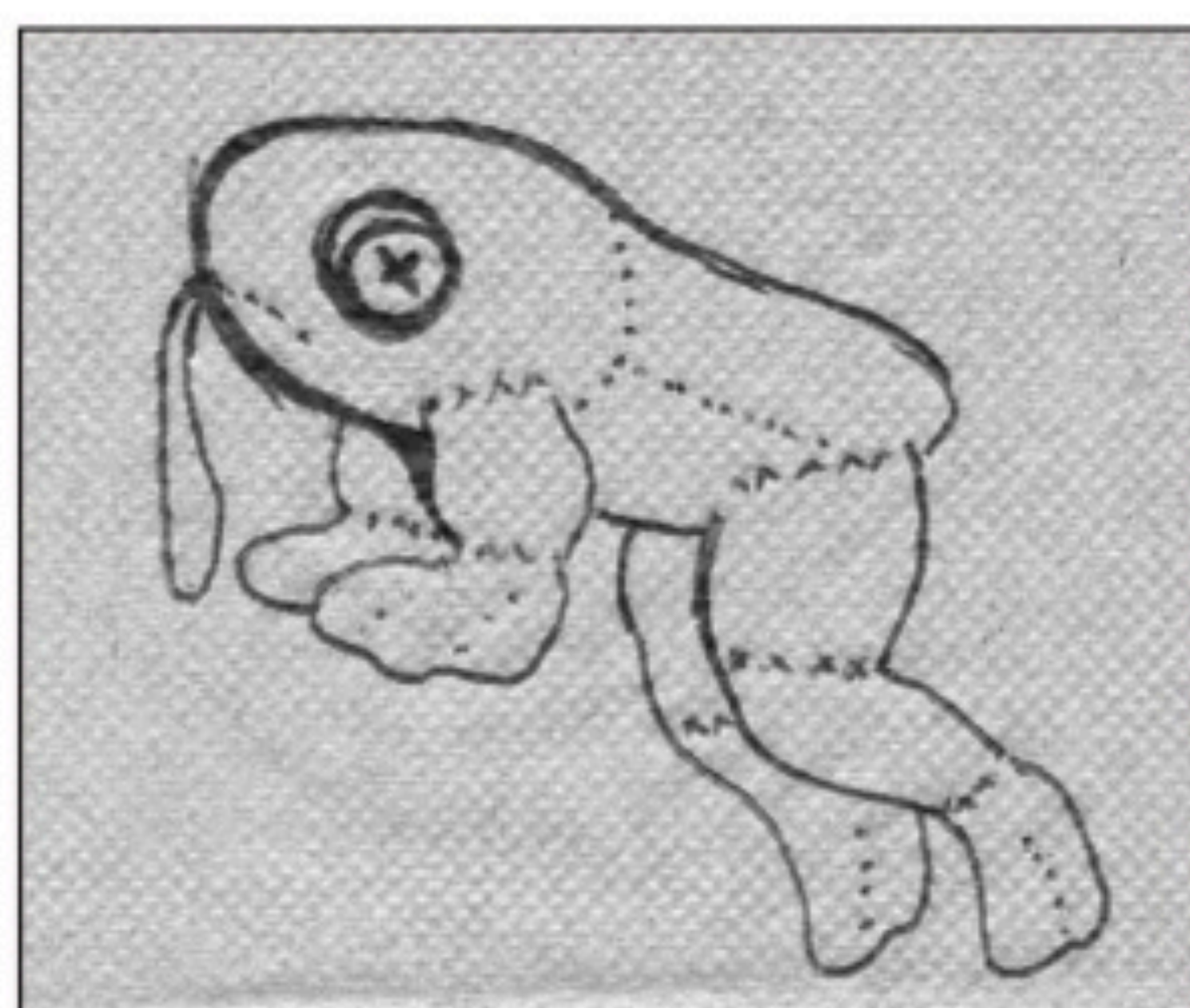
#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We thought it would be funny if there was a robot where you would have to turn his key to power him up. "Turn my key, turn my key, turn my key!"

## WEIRD CONCEPTS



Valiant Steed  
Hoerse



SILENCE...  
PEANUT!



#### Logo ☆

- Spike & Lano
- interface ☆ - look & feel
- illustrations of Cawey & Rex - Spike & Lano

Mar. Badass

Black w/  
orange scales  
yellow highlight  
fatter/wider  
head  
scales vaguely  
lava-esque  
dragonheart-ish





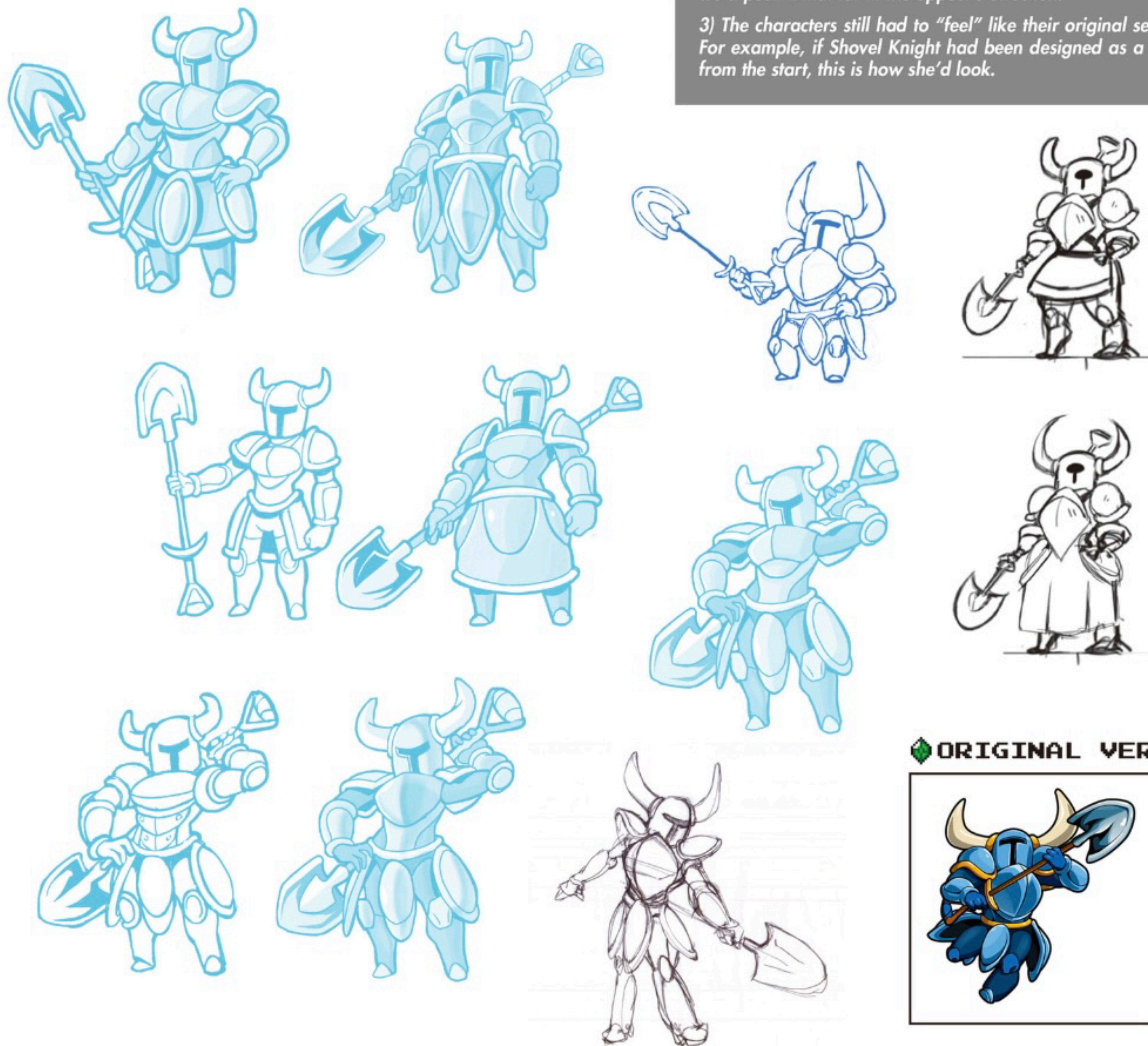
# BODY SWAP MODE CONCEPTS

## SHOVEL KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)

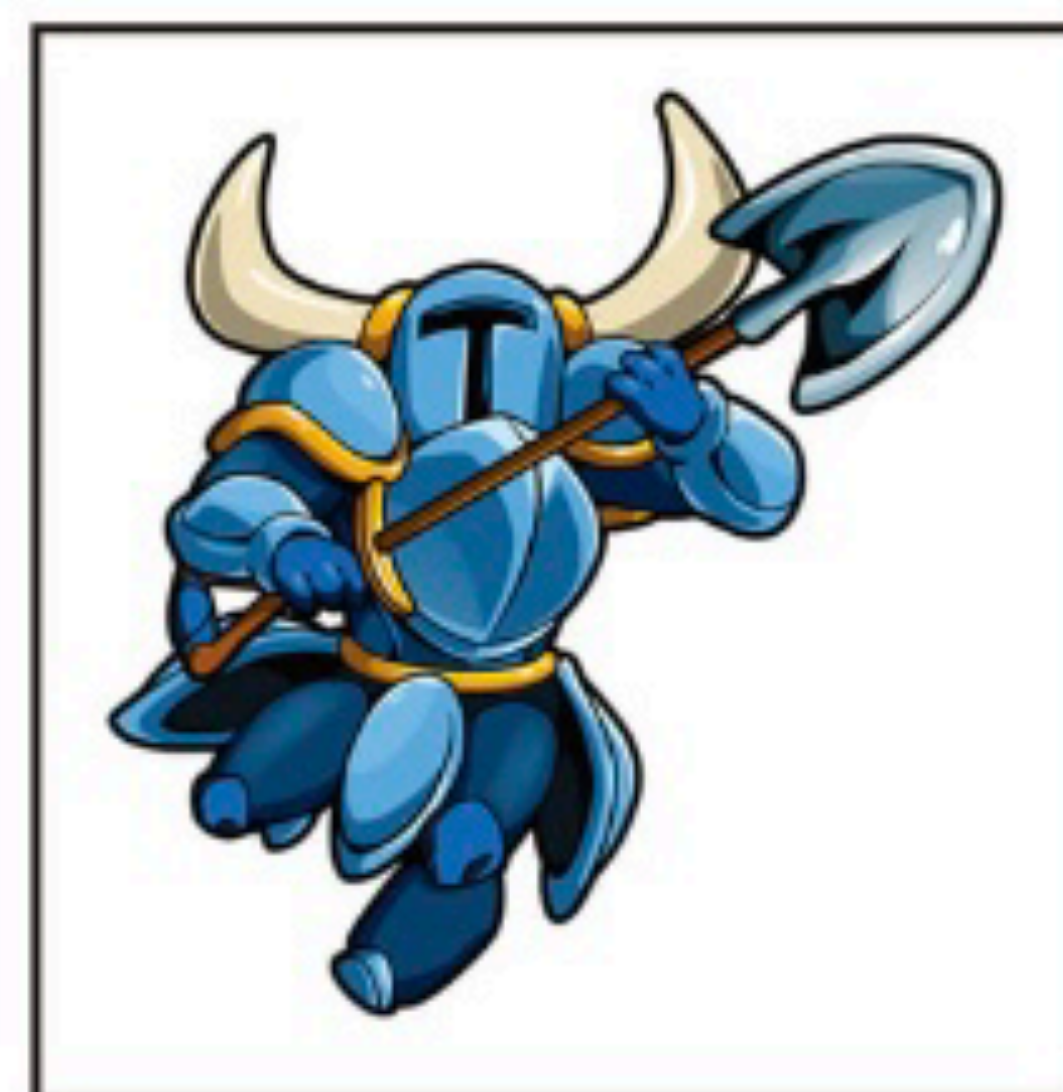
### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We had three main considerations for the body swap mode:

- 1) All of the characters' sizes and proportions had to be the same to keep the gameplay consistent.
- 2) Each character needed the same gender accentuations - if a character was already heavily gendered, for example, we'd push it that far in the opposite direction.
- 3) The characters still had to "feel" like their original selves. For example, if Shovel Knight had been designed as a lady from the start, this is how she'd look.



### ORIGINAL VER.



### BODY SWAP SIZE COMPARISON





## SHIELD KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)

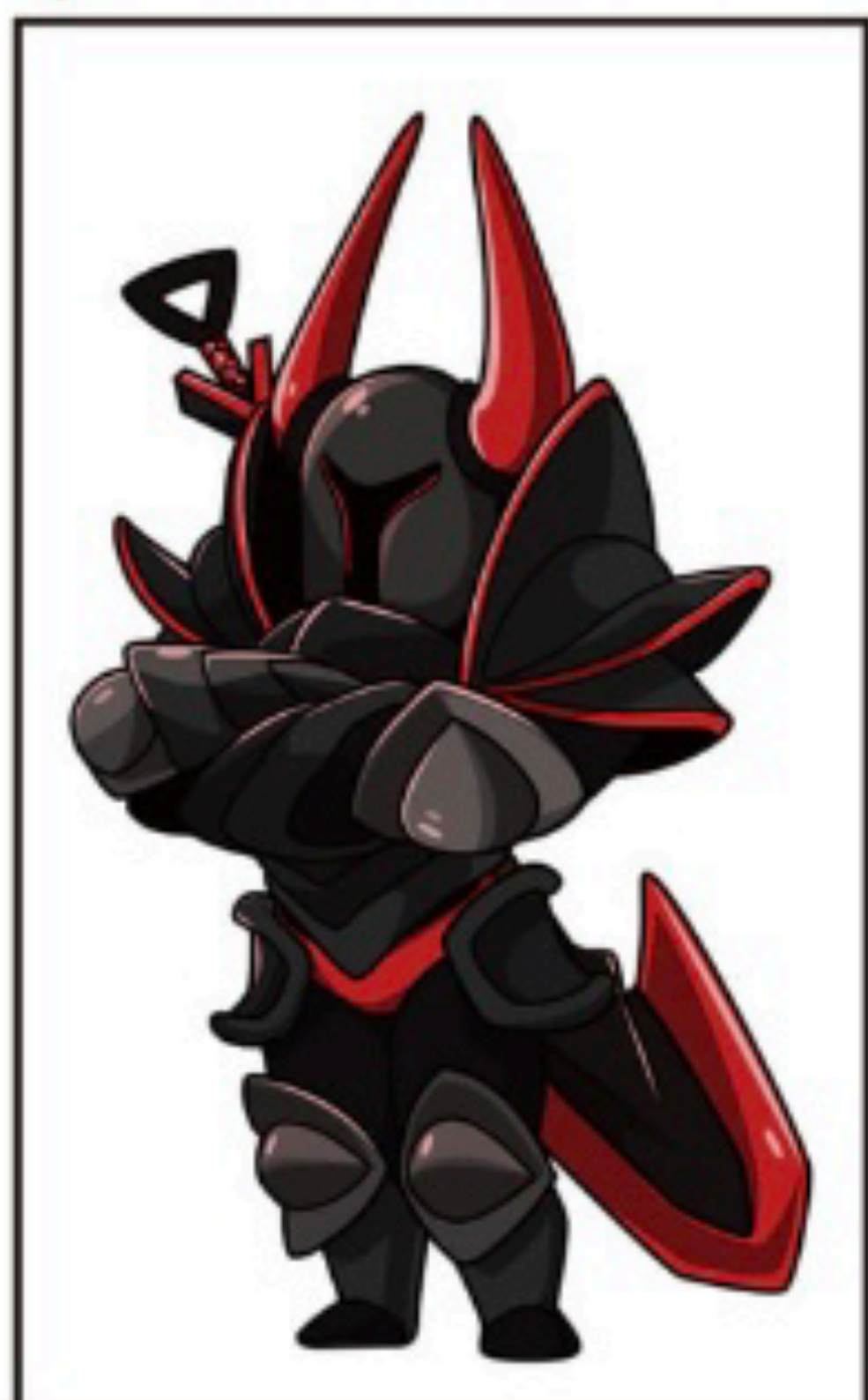


◆ ORIGINAL VER.



## BLACK KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)

◆ ORIGINAL VER.



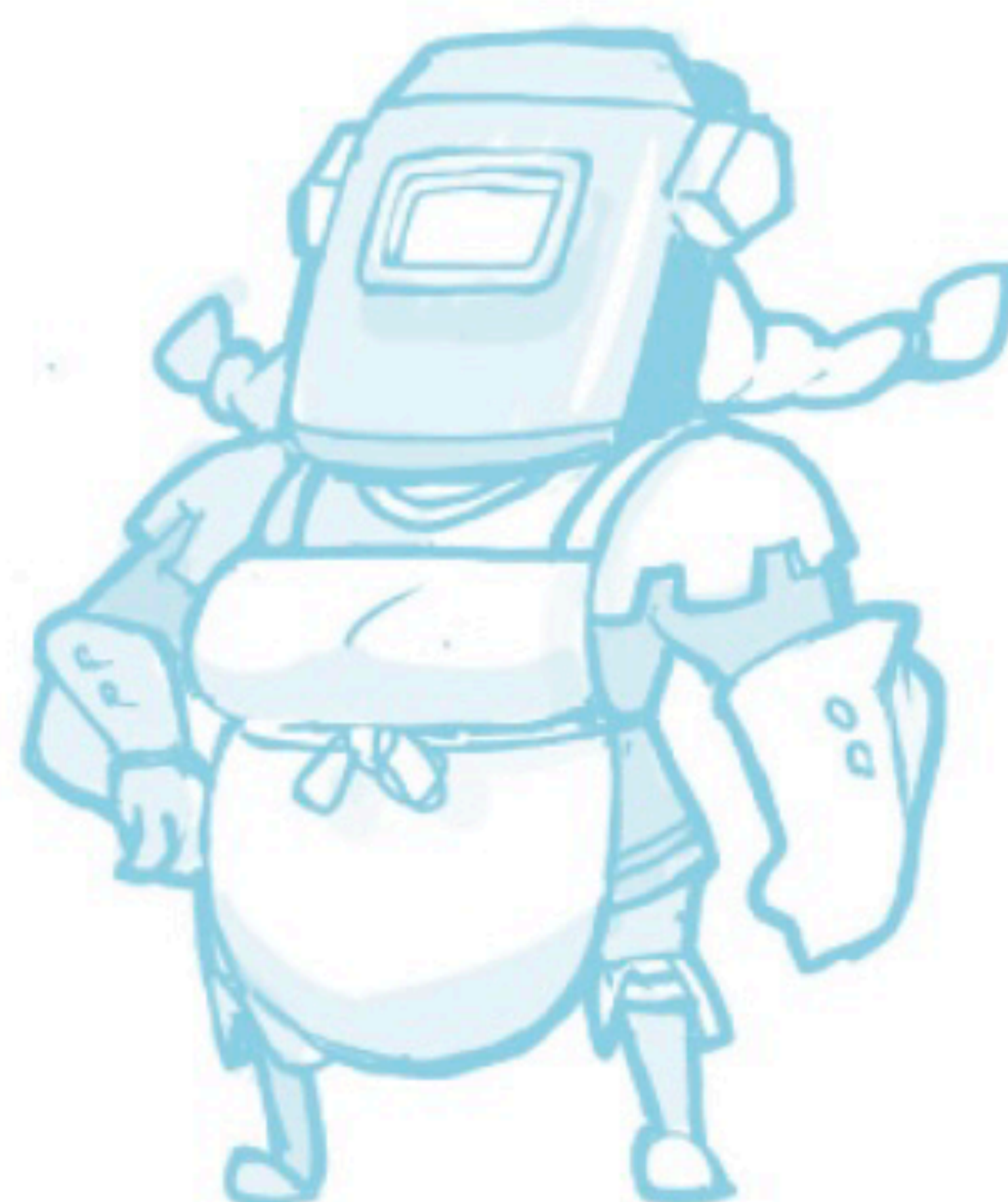


## QUEEN KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)

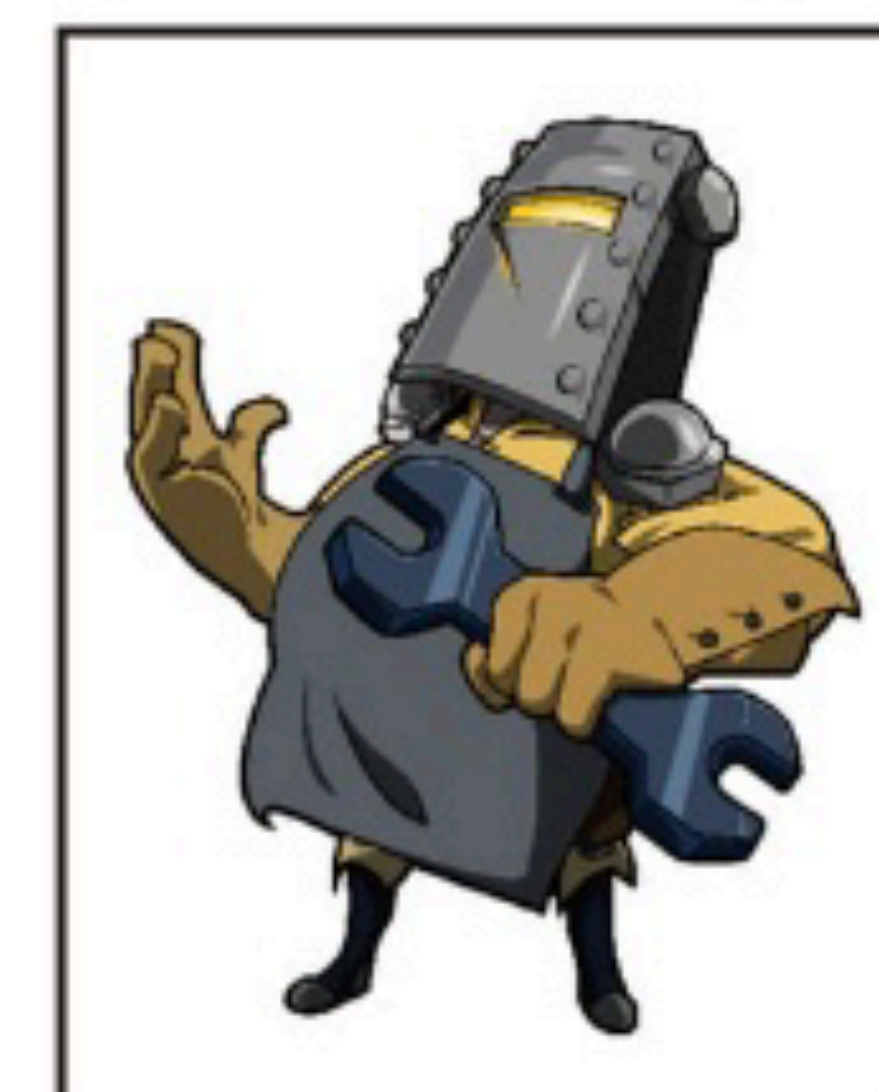


ORIGINAL VER.

## TINKER KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)

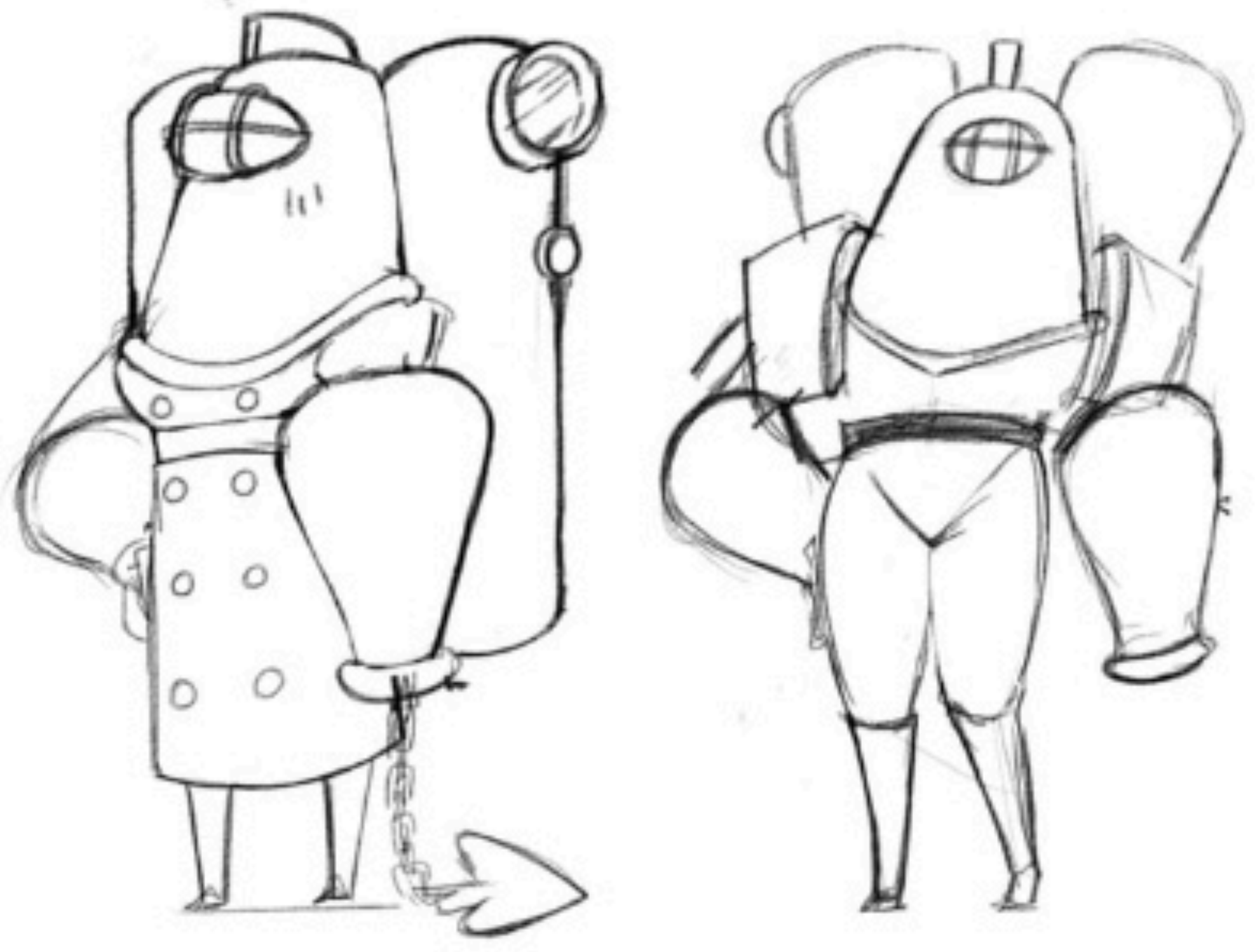
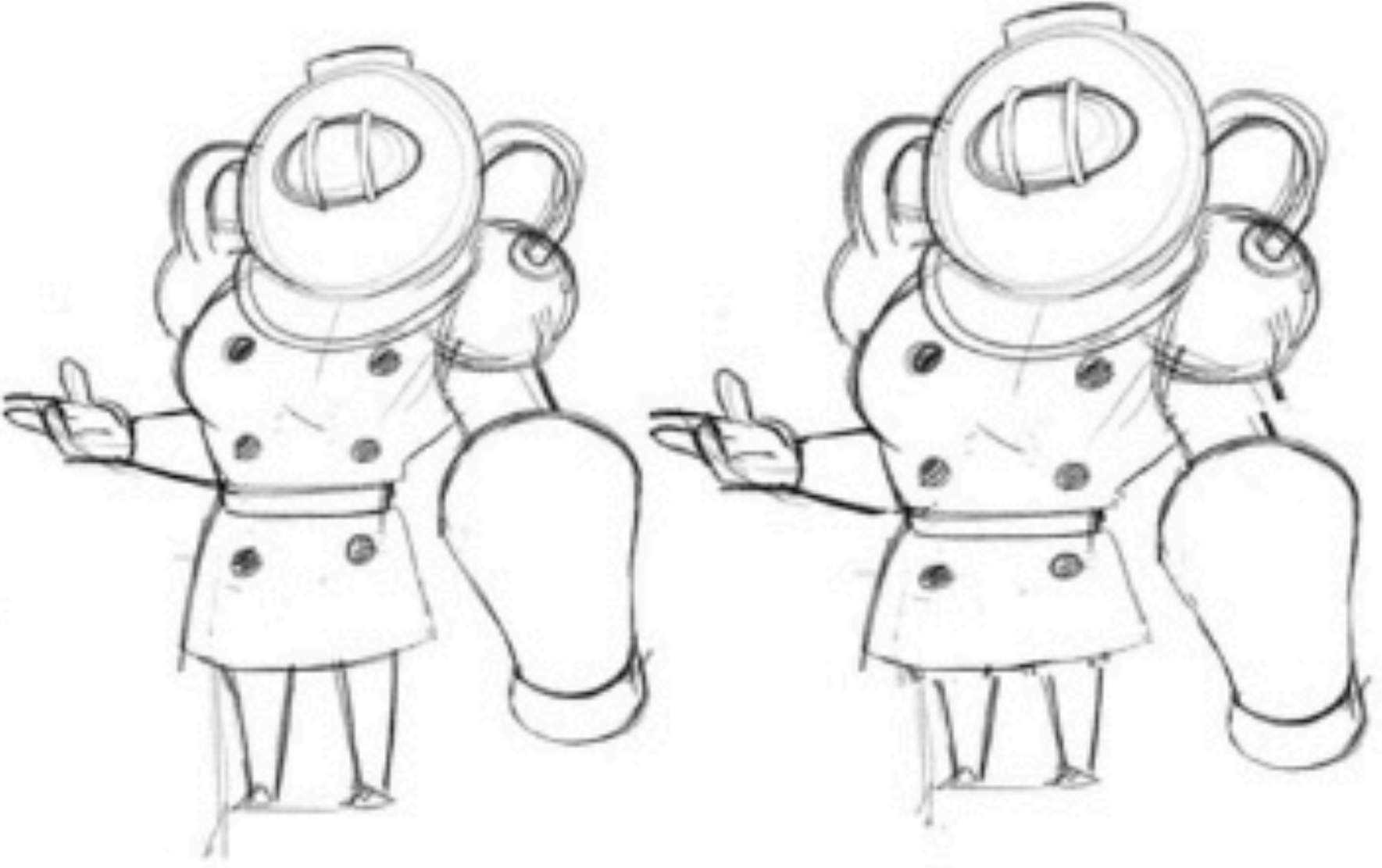


ORIGINAL VER.





# TREASURE KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)



ORIGINAL VER.

# PLAGUE KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)



ORIGINAL VER.





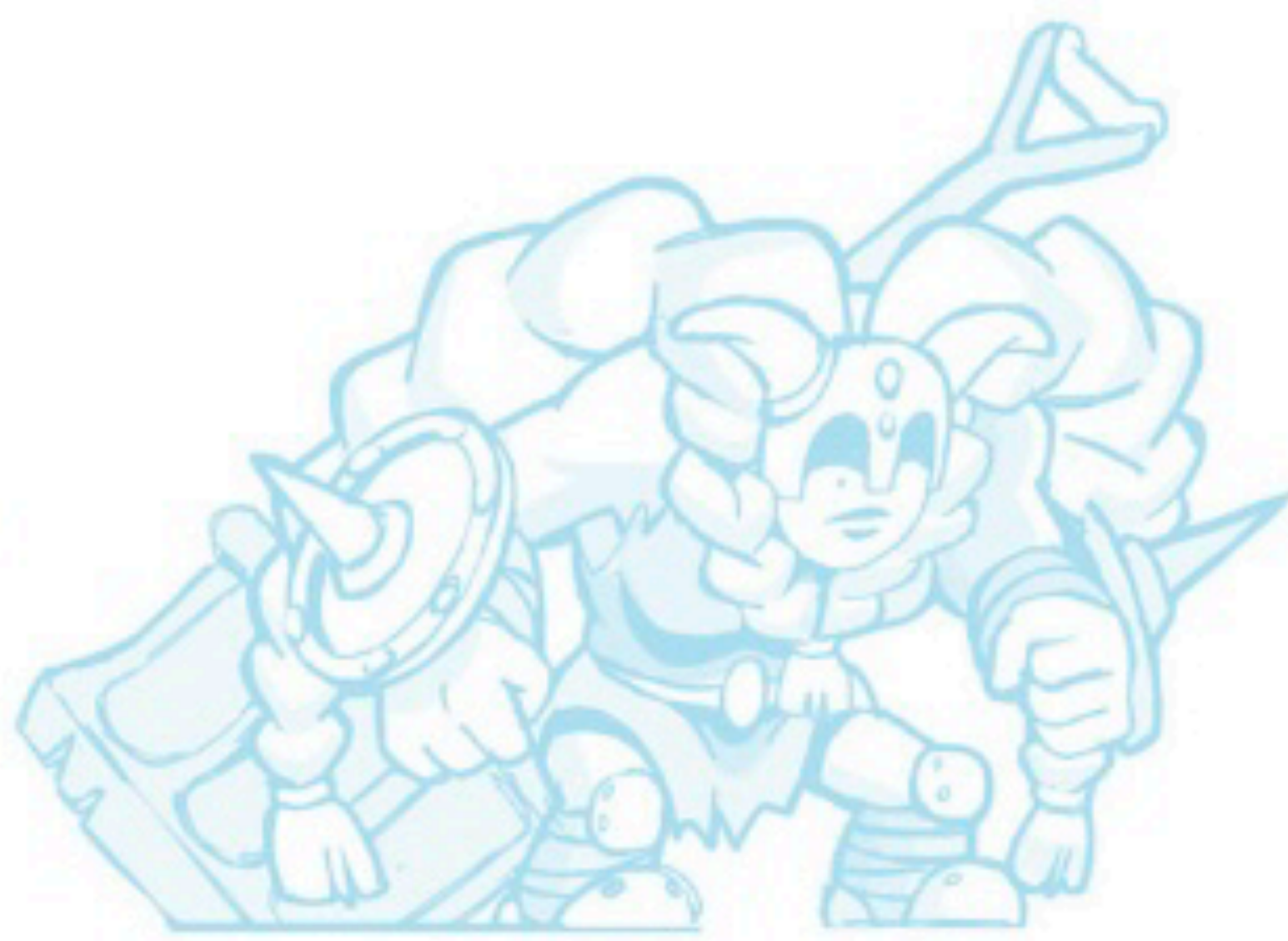
## POLAR KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)



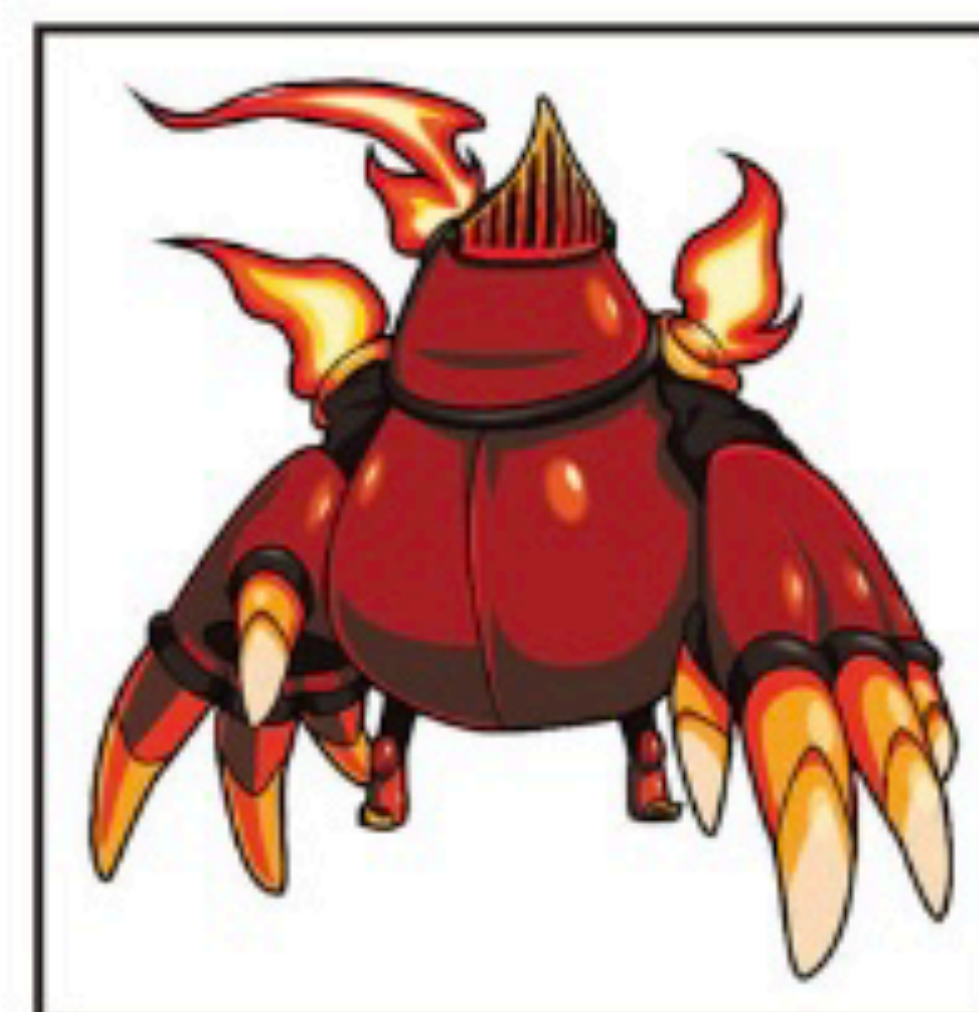
◆ ORIGINAL VER.

### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*Polar Knight's female version is genius! We gave her giant, thick hair braids so she'd have the same broad proportions as the male version.*



## MOLE KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)



◆ ORIGINAL VER.

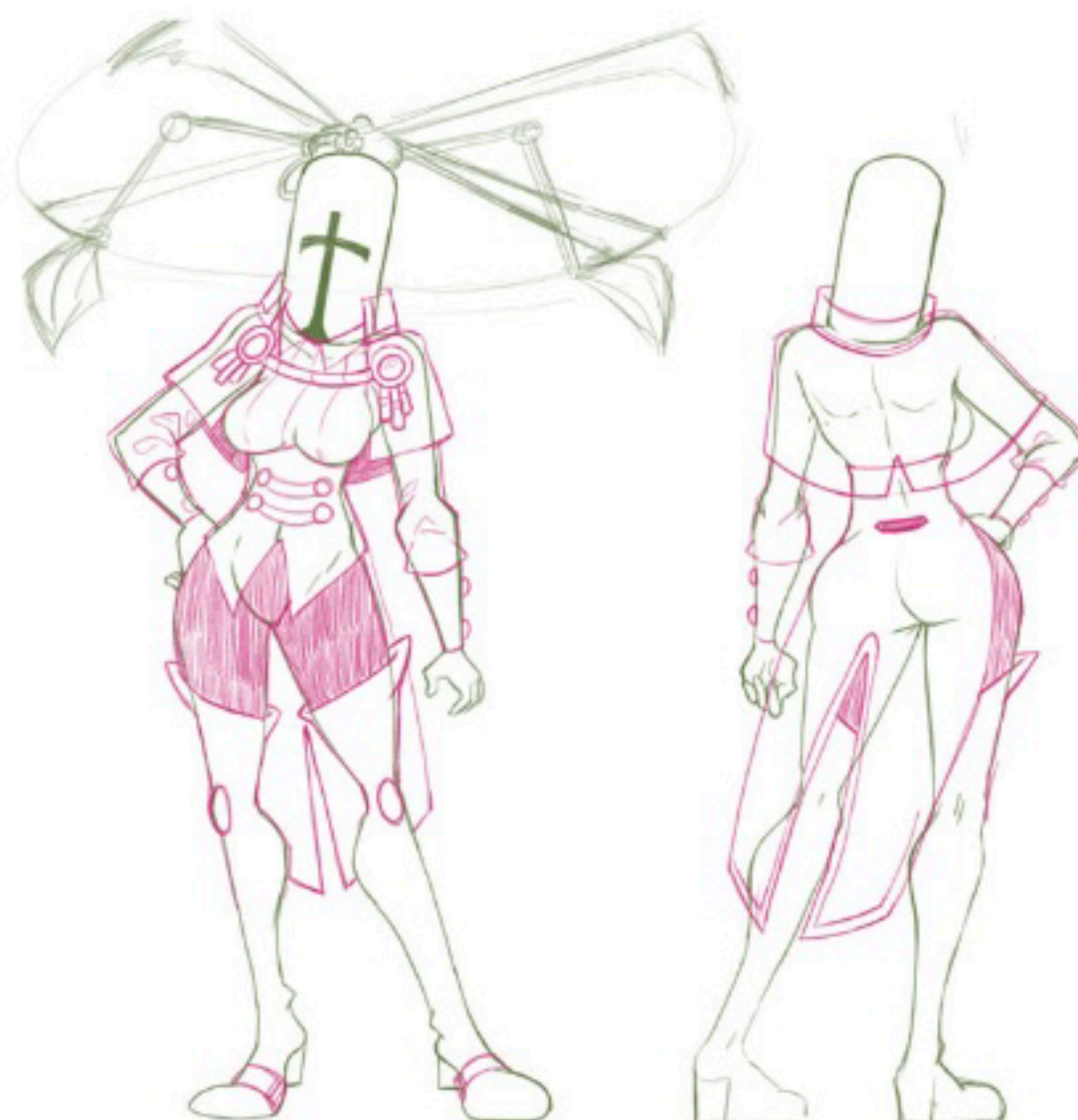




## PROPELLER KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)



◆ ORIGINAL VER.



### DEV. COMMENTARY

*This Propeller Knight was a bit too dainty and didn't match the high-flying ace's attitude.*

## SPECTER KNIGHT (BODY SWAP)



◆ ORIGINAL VER.



## THE BARD (BODY SWAP)

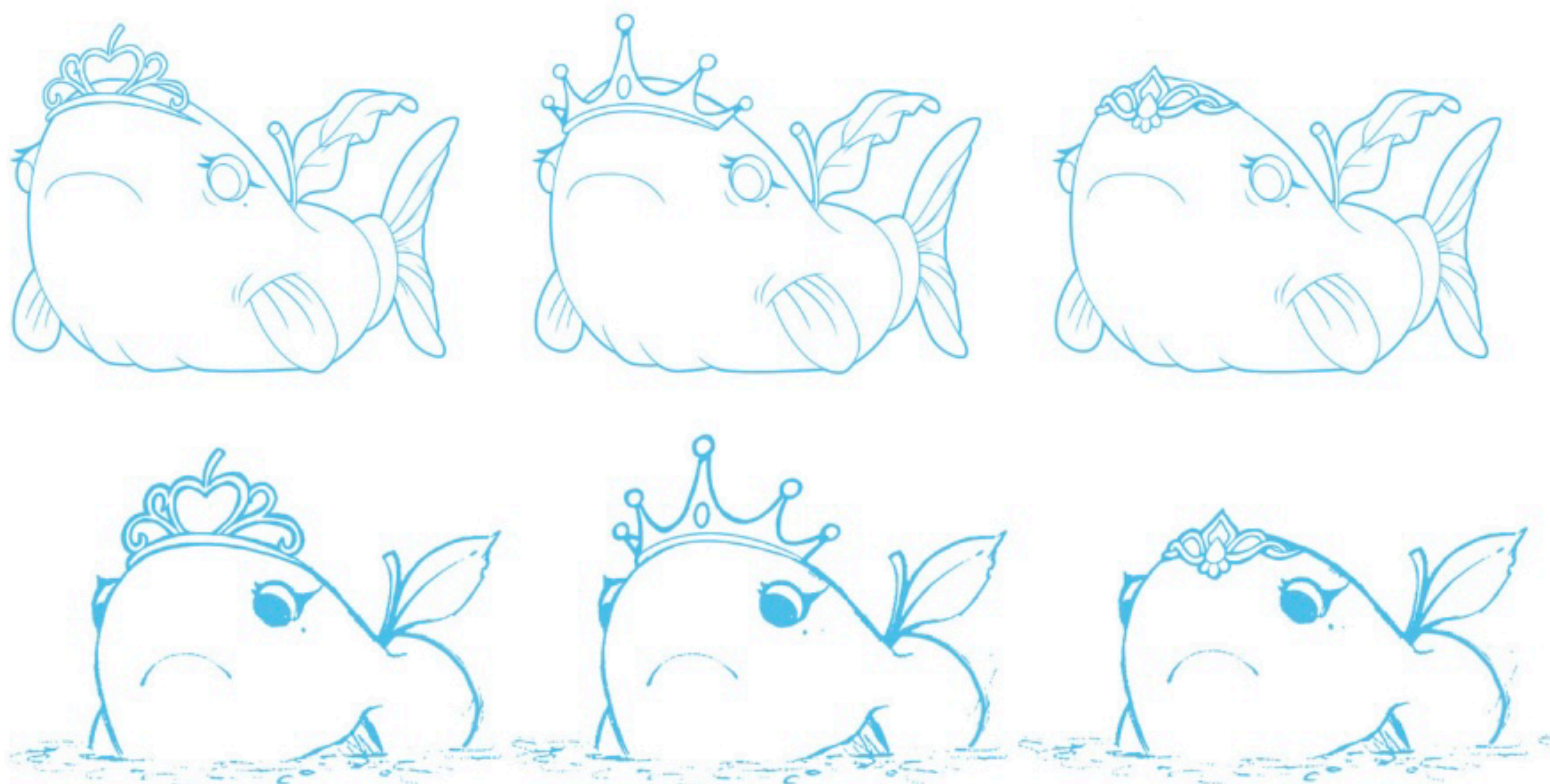


◆ ORIGINAL VER.

## THE TROUPPLE QUEEN (BODY SWAP)



◆ ORIGINAL VER.





**CHESTER**  
(BODY SWAP)



ORIGINAL VER.

**MONA**  
(BODY SWAP)



ORIGINAL VER.

**THE MAGICIST**  
(BODY SWAP)



ORIGINAL VER.



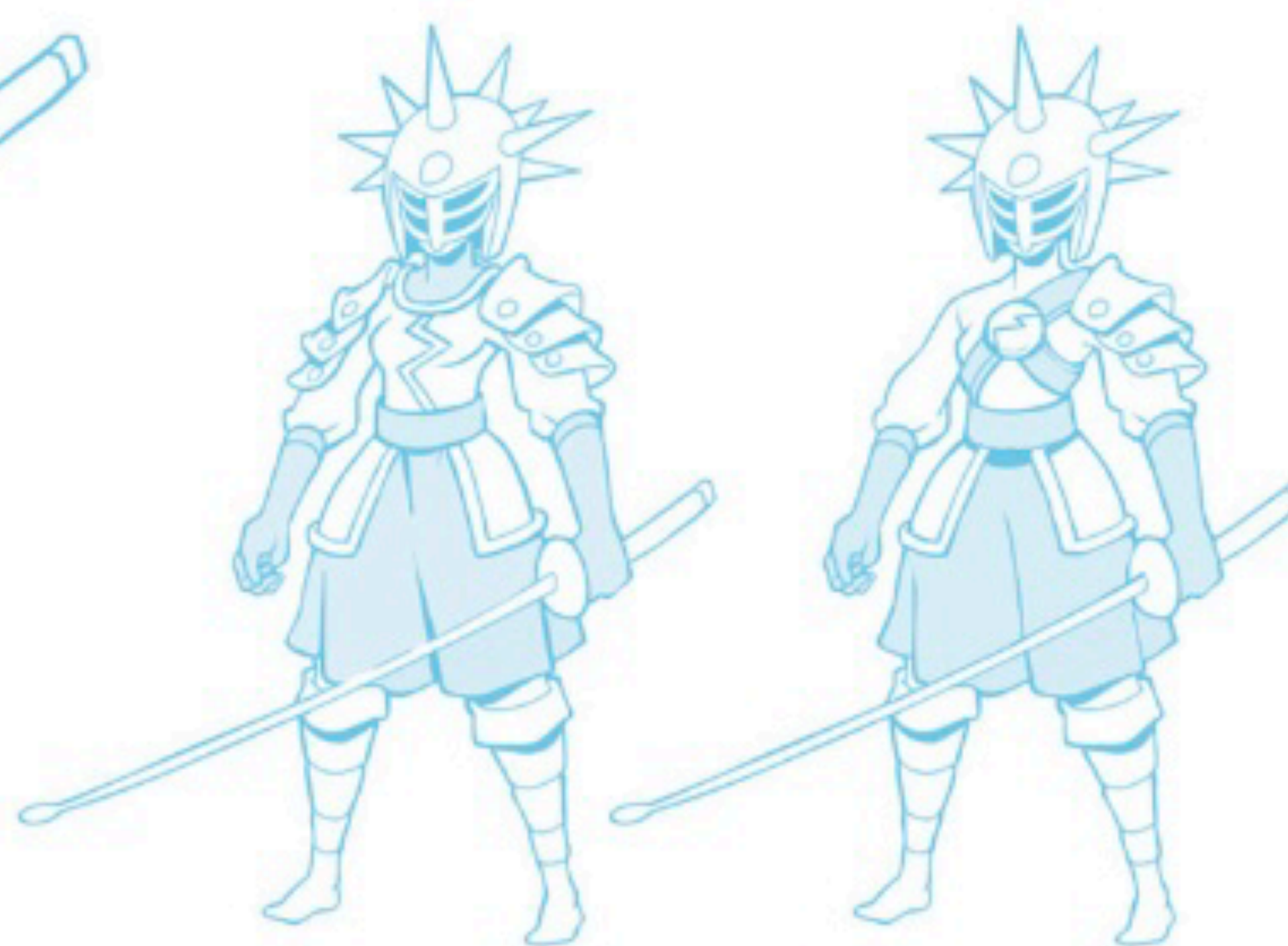
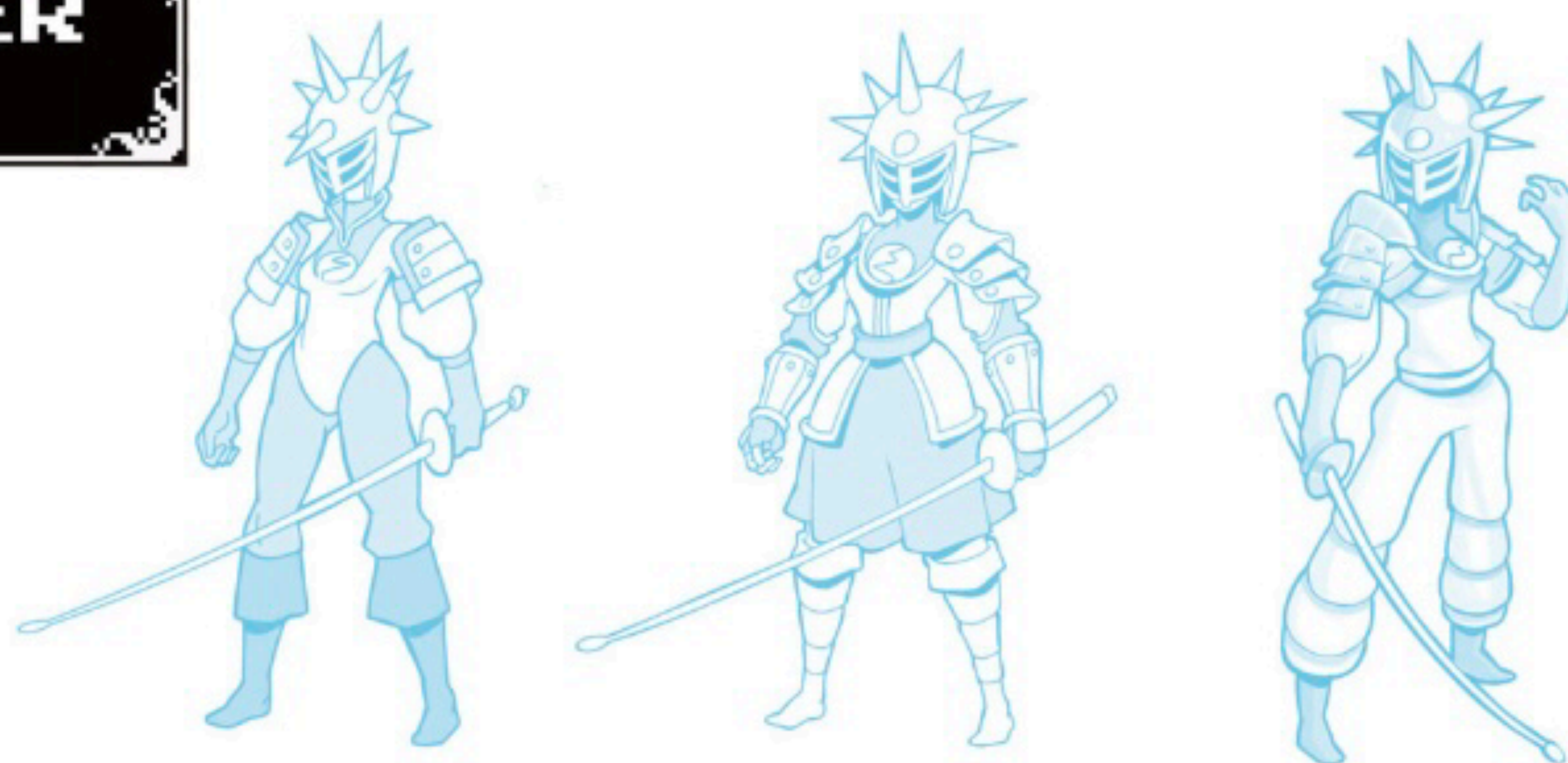
## THE GASTRONOMER (BODY SWAP)



ORIGINAL VER.



## PHANTOM STRIKER (BODY SWAP)

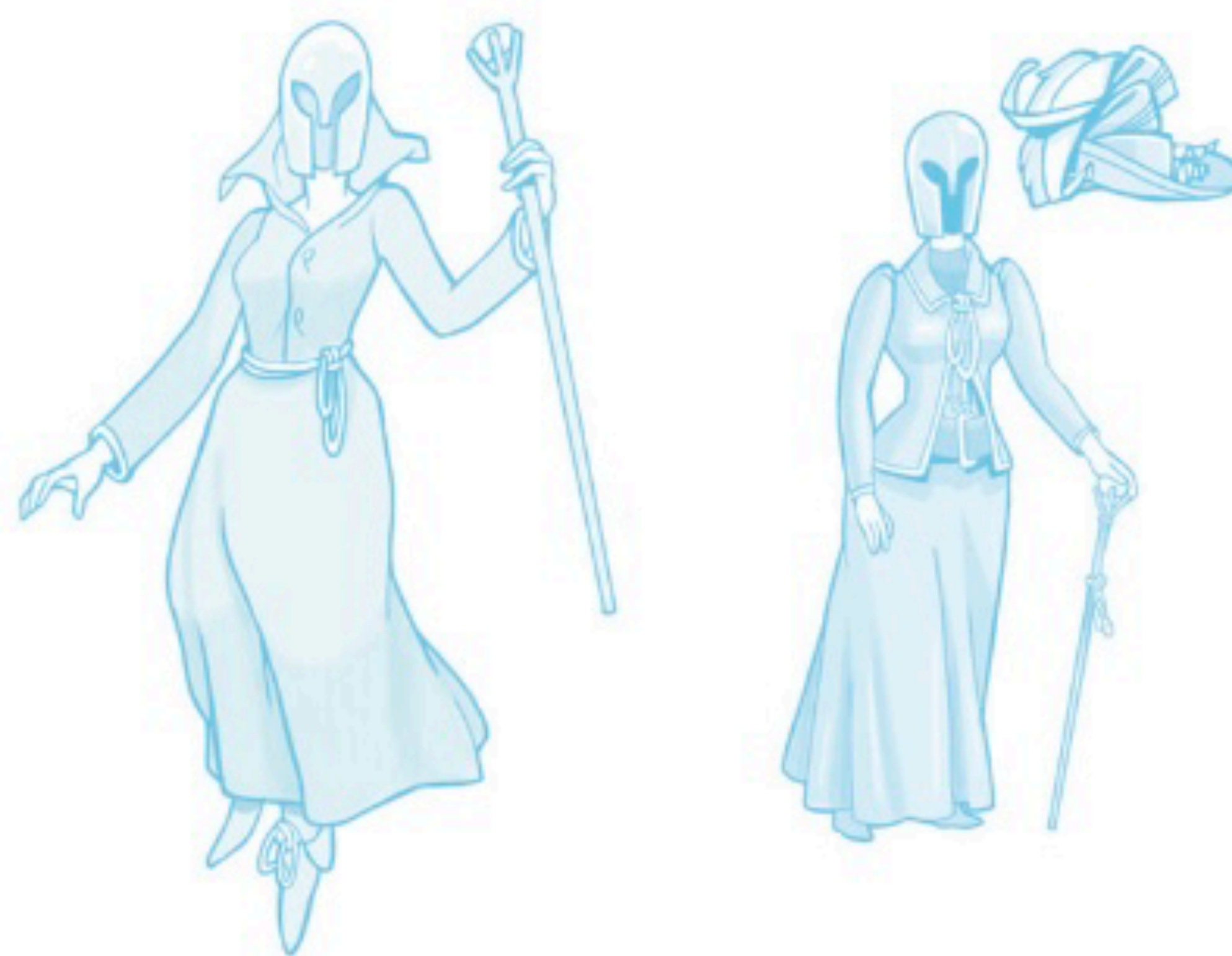


ORIGINAL VER.

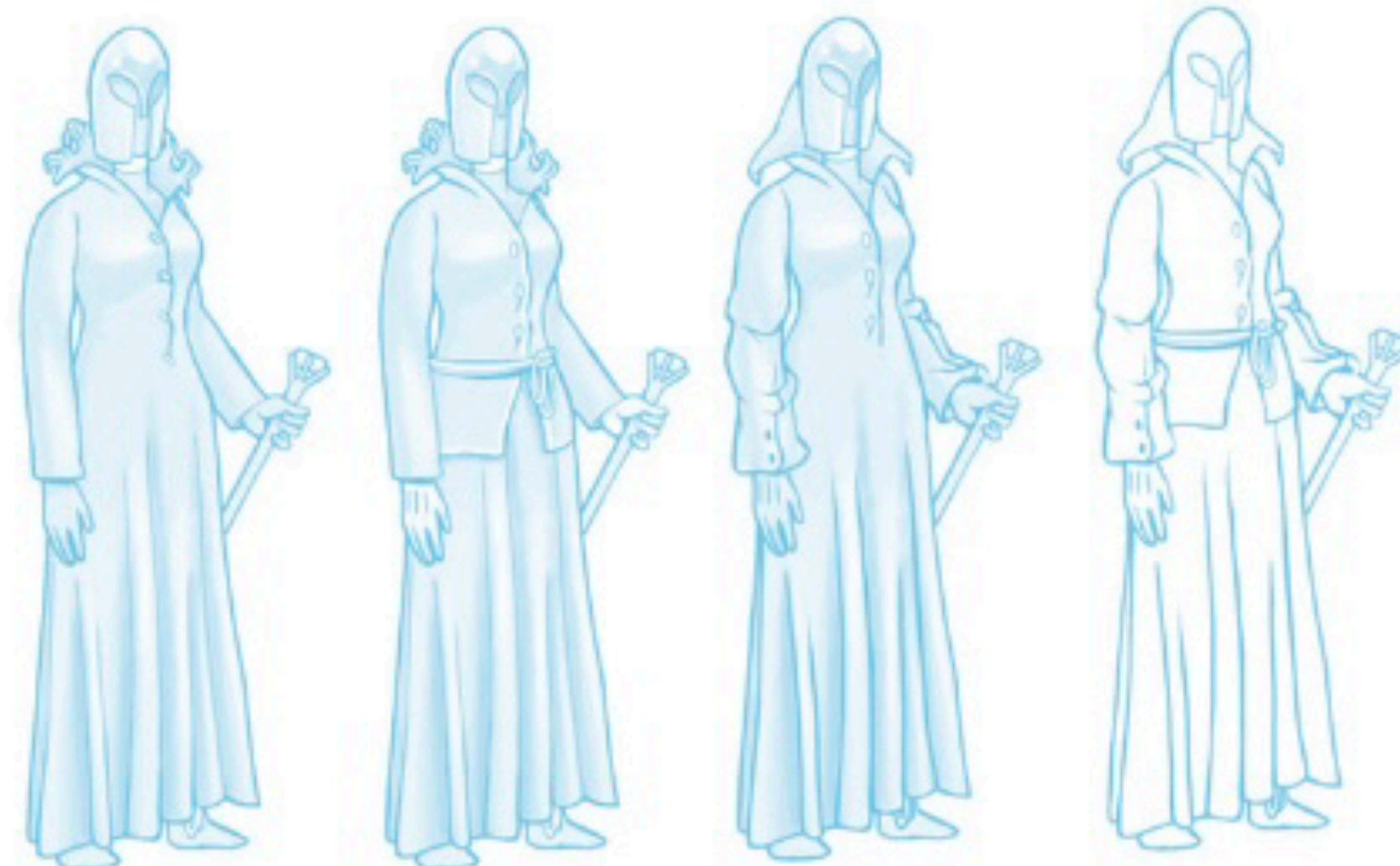




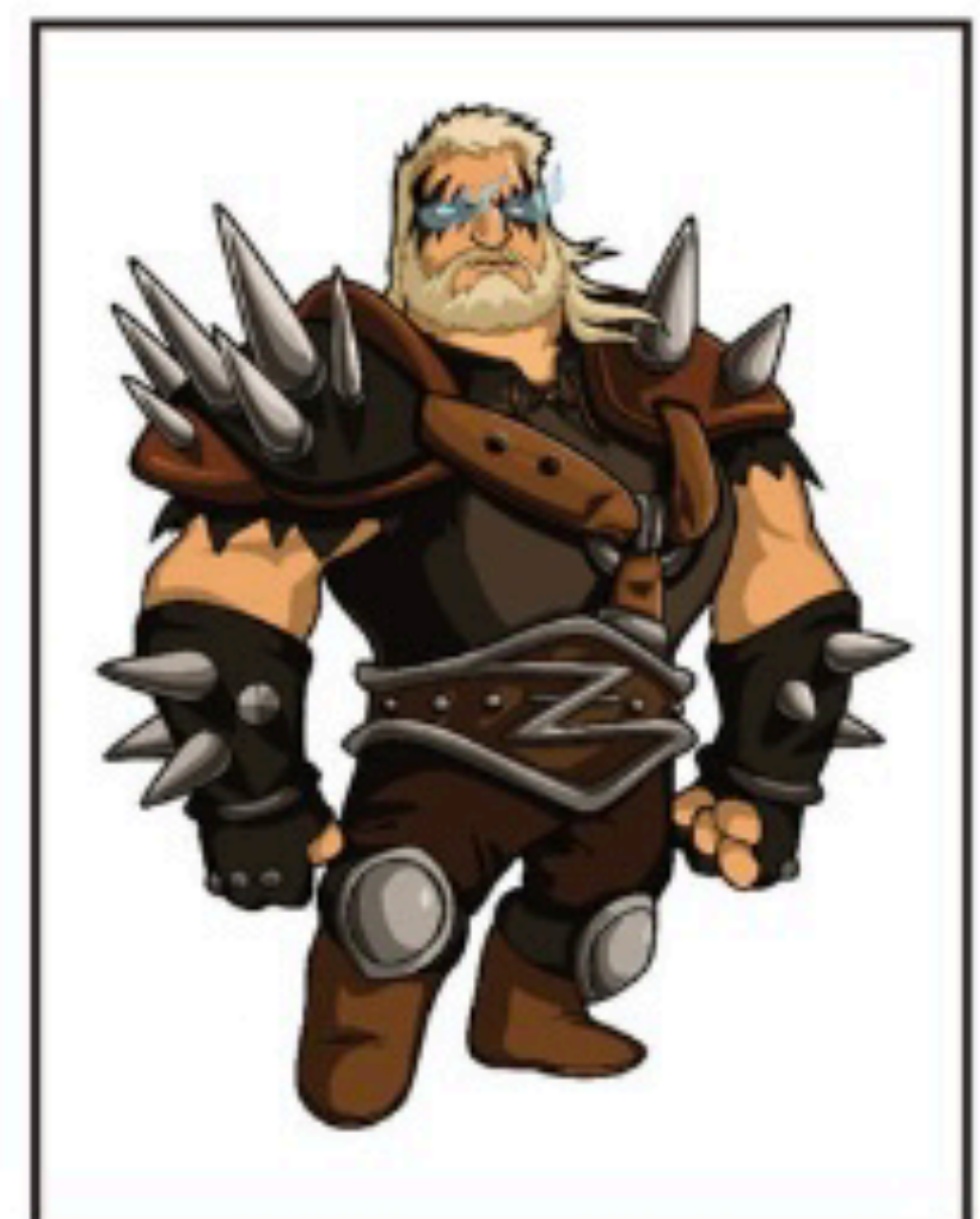
**MRS. HAT**  
(BODY SWAP)



◆ ORIGINAL VER.



**THE BAZ**  
(BODY SWAP)



◆ ORIGINAL VER.

**REIZE SEATLAN**  
(BODY SWAP)



◆ ORIGINAL VER.



# THE ENCHANTER (BODY SWAP)



ORIGINAL VER.



## DEV. COMMENTARY

The "Enchanter" was one of the first body swap concepts we explored. It went in many different directions before we got it right.



SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS







## CHAPTER 4 ARCHIVES

In this chapter, you'll find a collection of miscellaneous *Shovel Knight* production materials that don't quite belong with all the art in the rest of the book, but are vital all the same. Whether you're looking for painstakingly curated sprite sheets or want to see how some of the game's gorgeous stage backgrounds came together, you're in the right place!

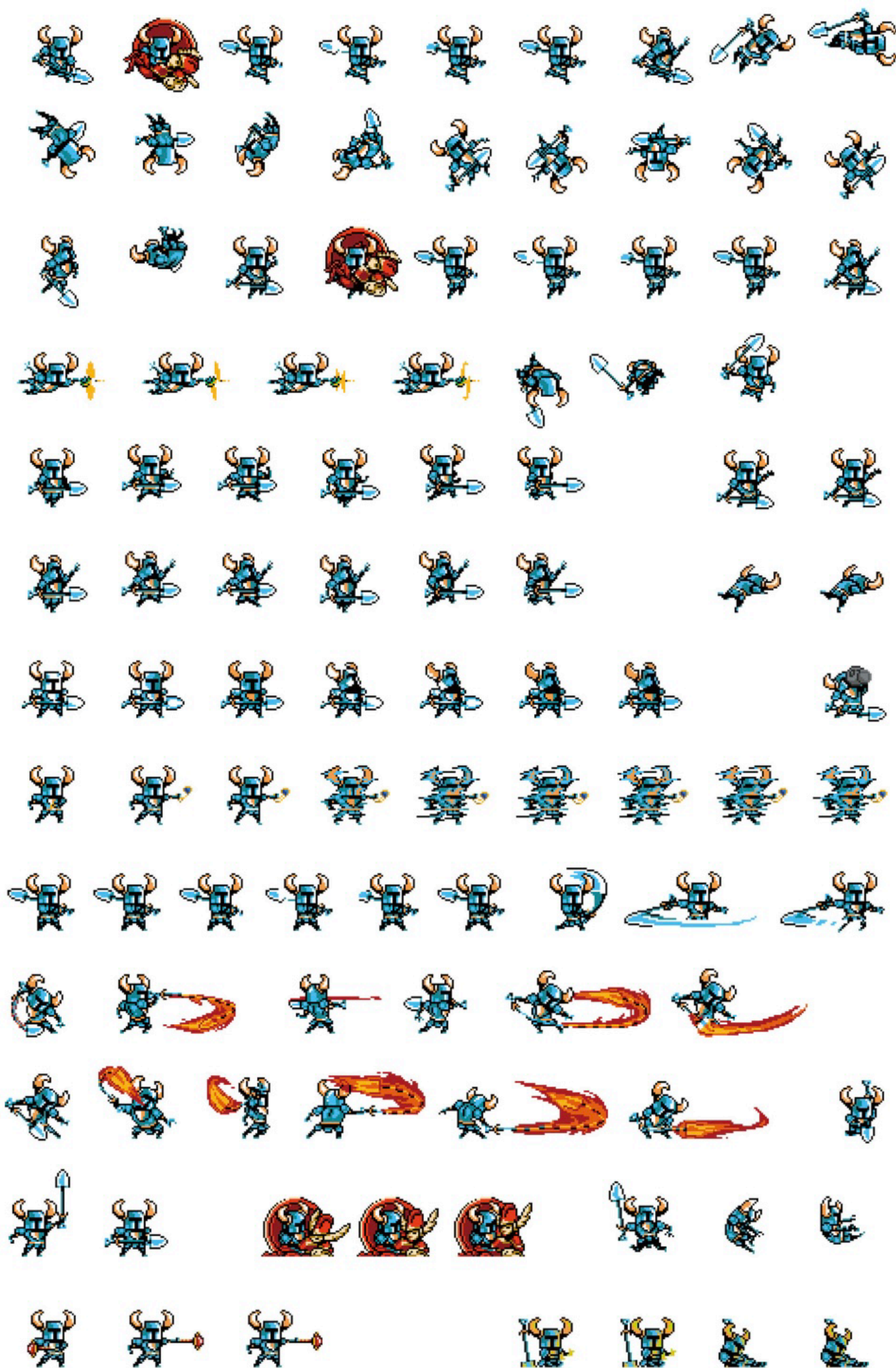




**SPRITE SHEET**  
(SHOVEL KNIGHT)

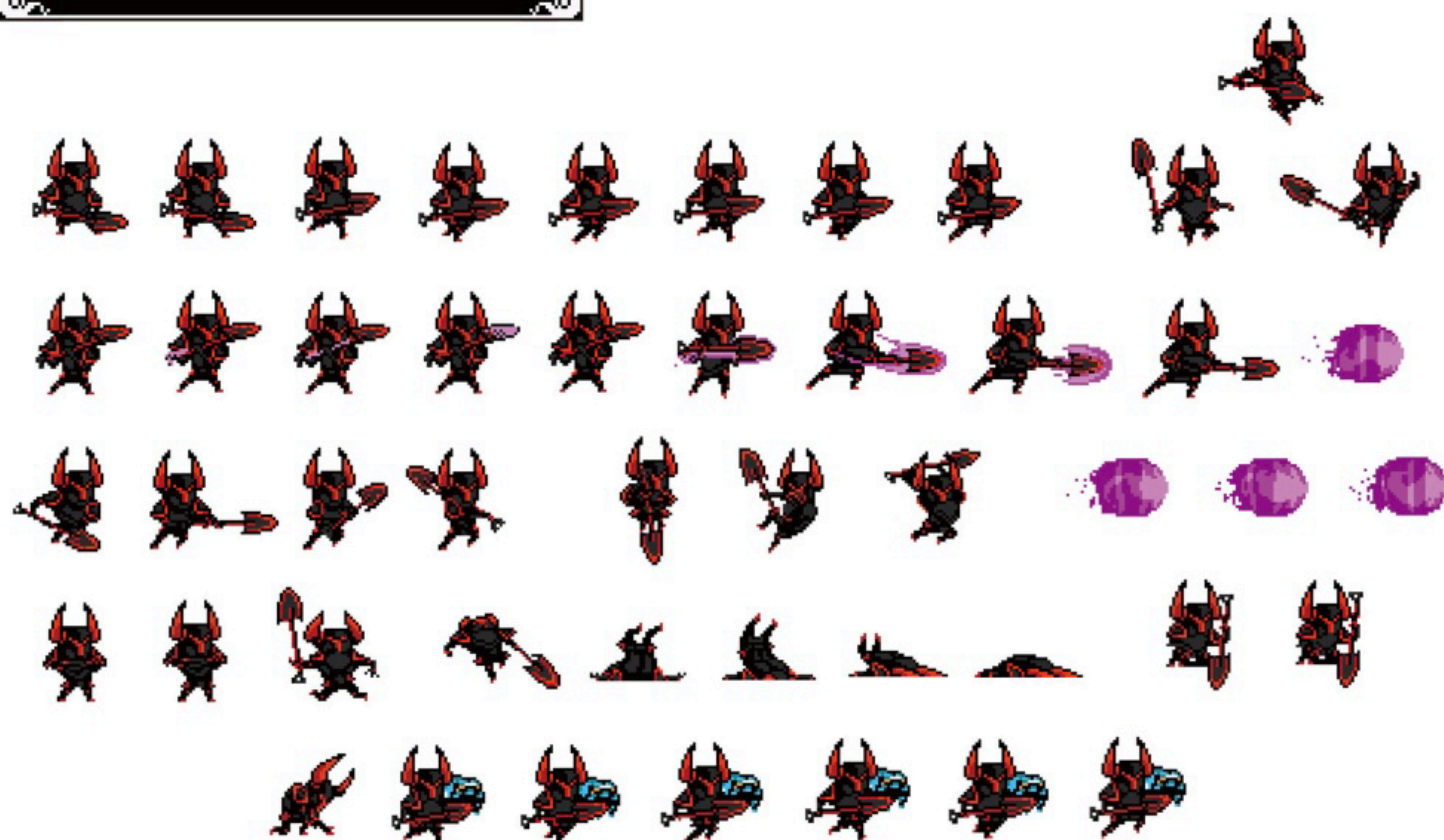




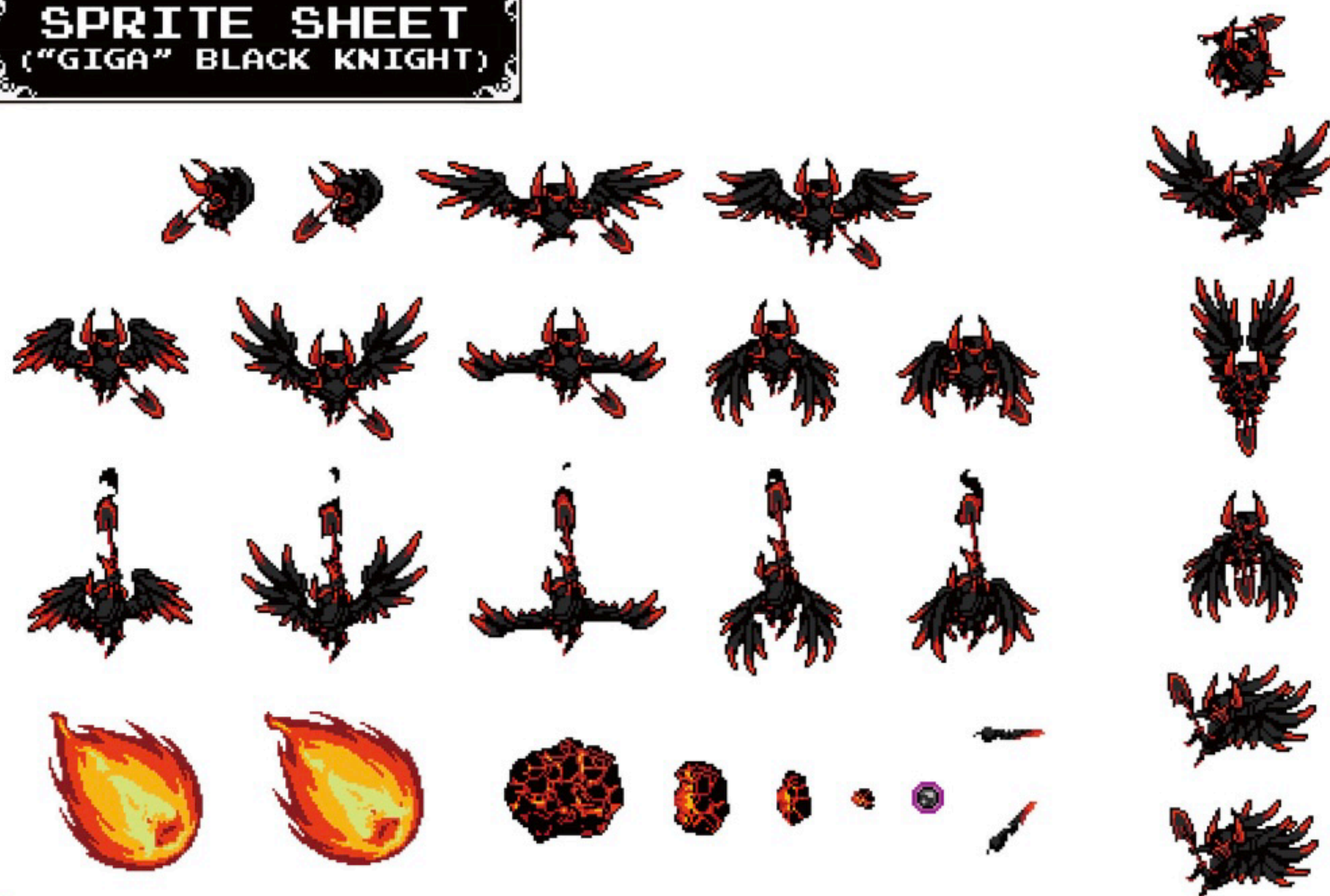




# SPRITE SHEET (BLACK KNIGHT)

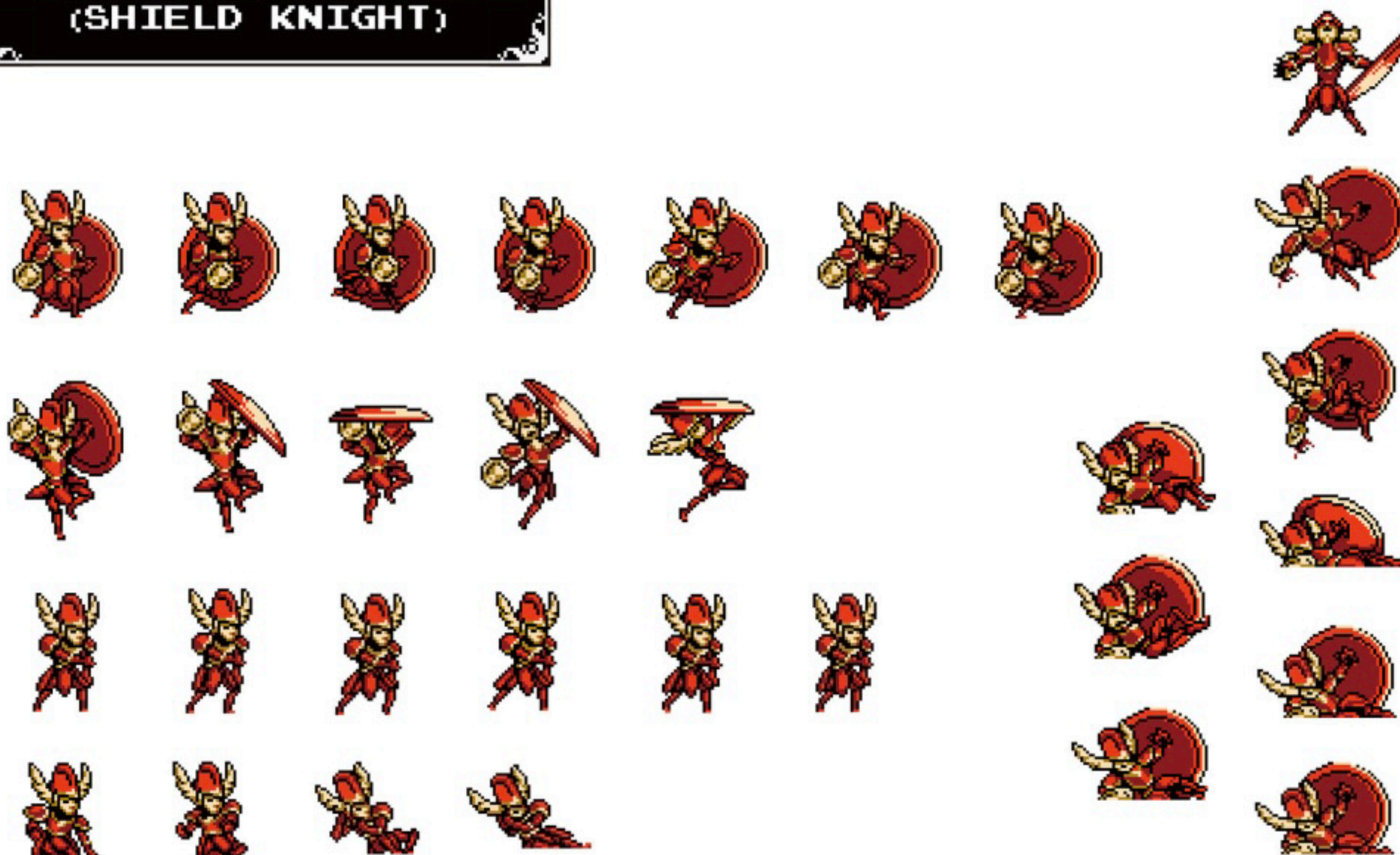


# SPRITE SHEET ("GIGA" BLACK KNIGHT)

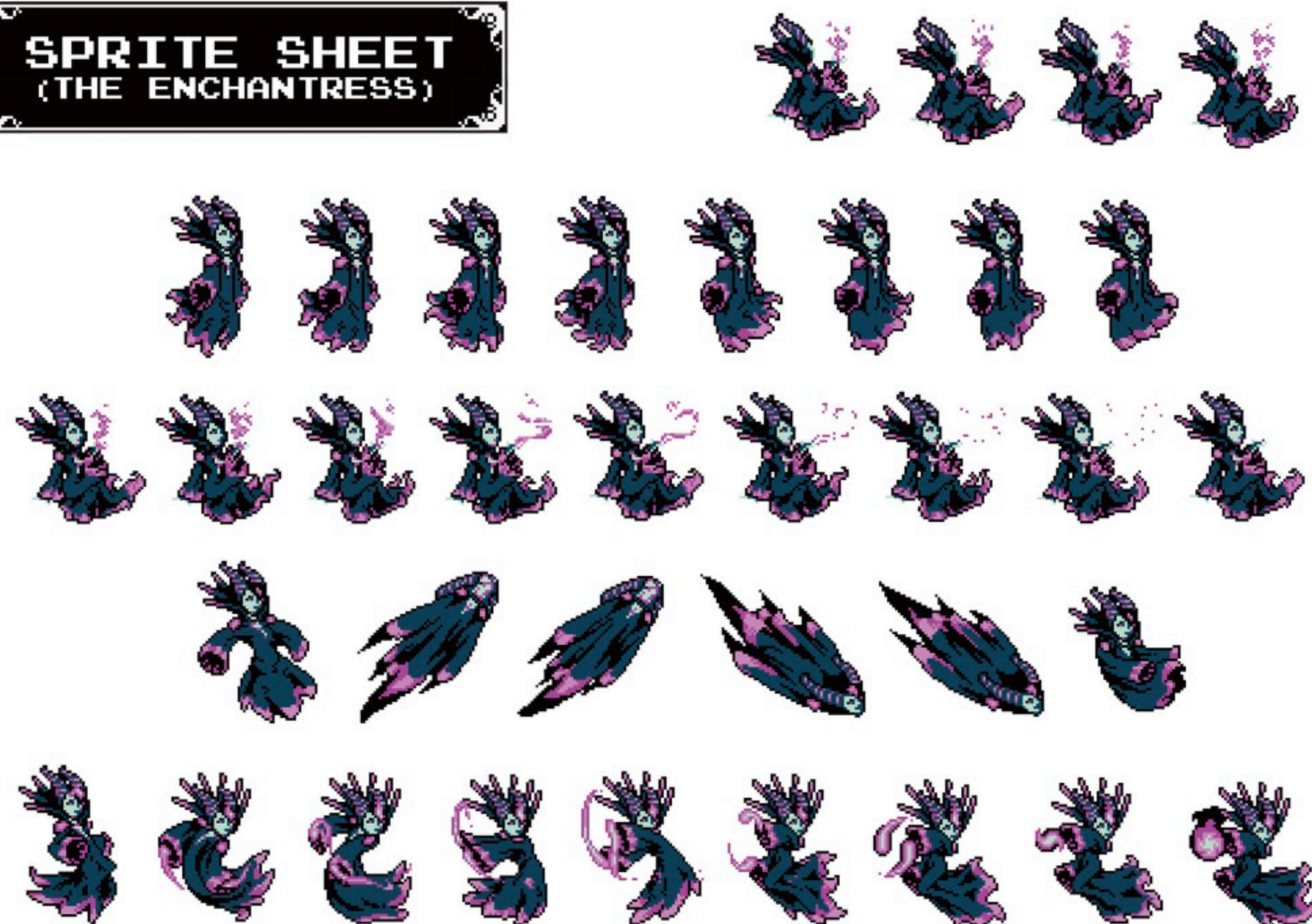




# SPRITE SHEET (SHIELD KNIGHT)

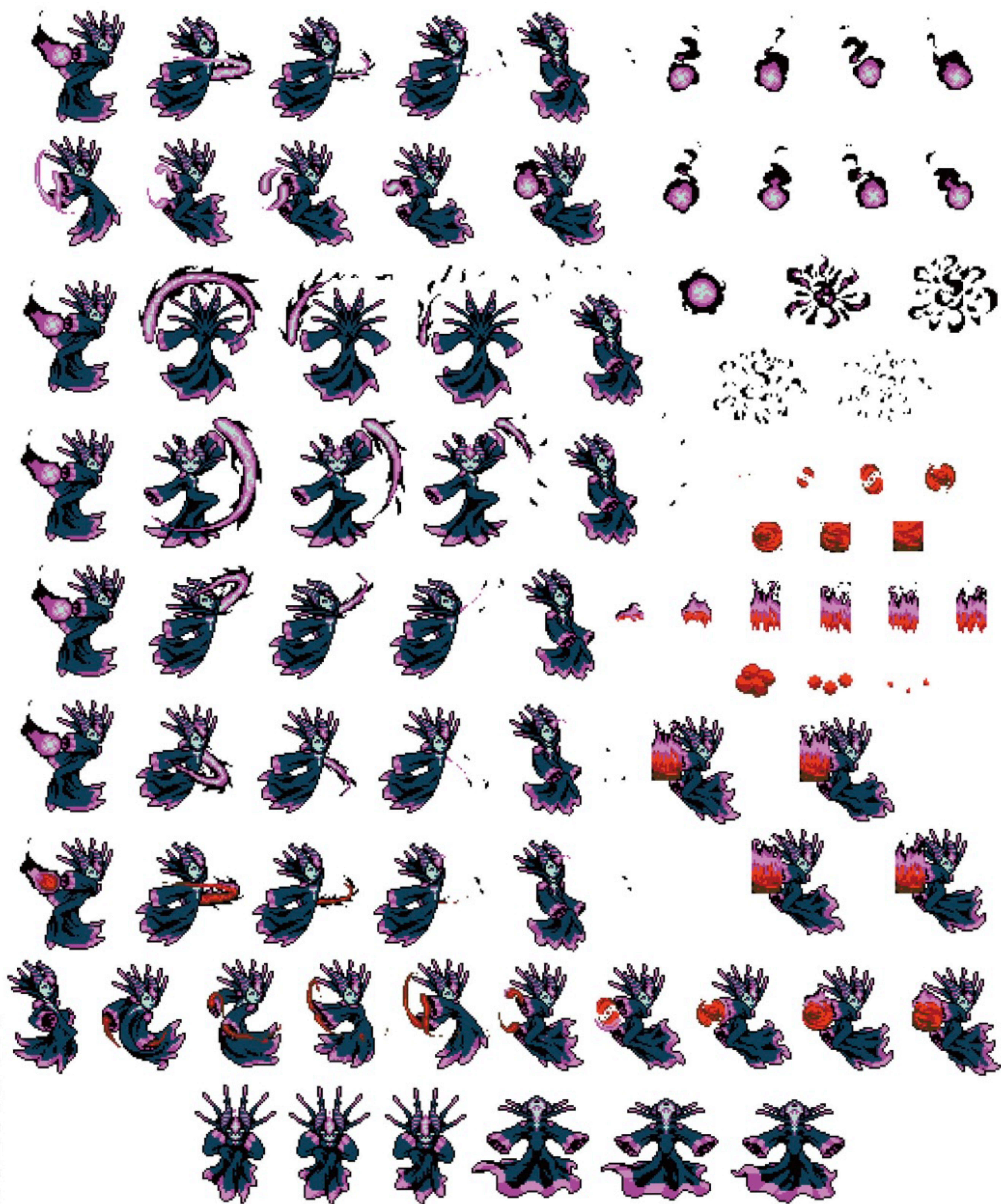


# SPRITE SHEET (THE ENCHANTRESS)





# SPRITE SHEET (THE ENCHANTRESS)

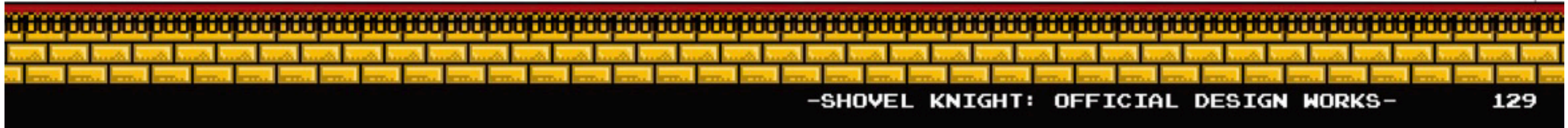


ARCHIVES





**SPRITE SHEET**  
(REMNANT OF FATE)





**SPRITE SHEET**  
(KING KNIGHT)

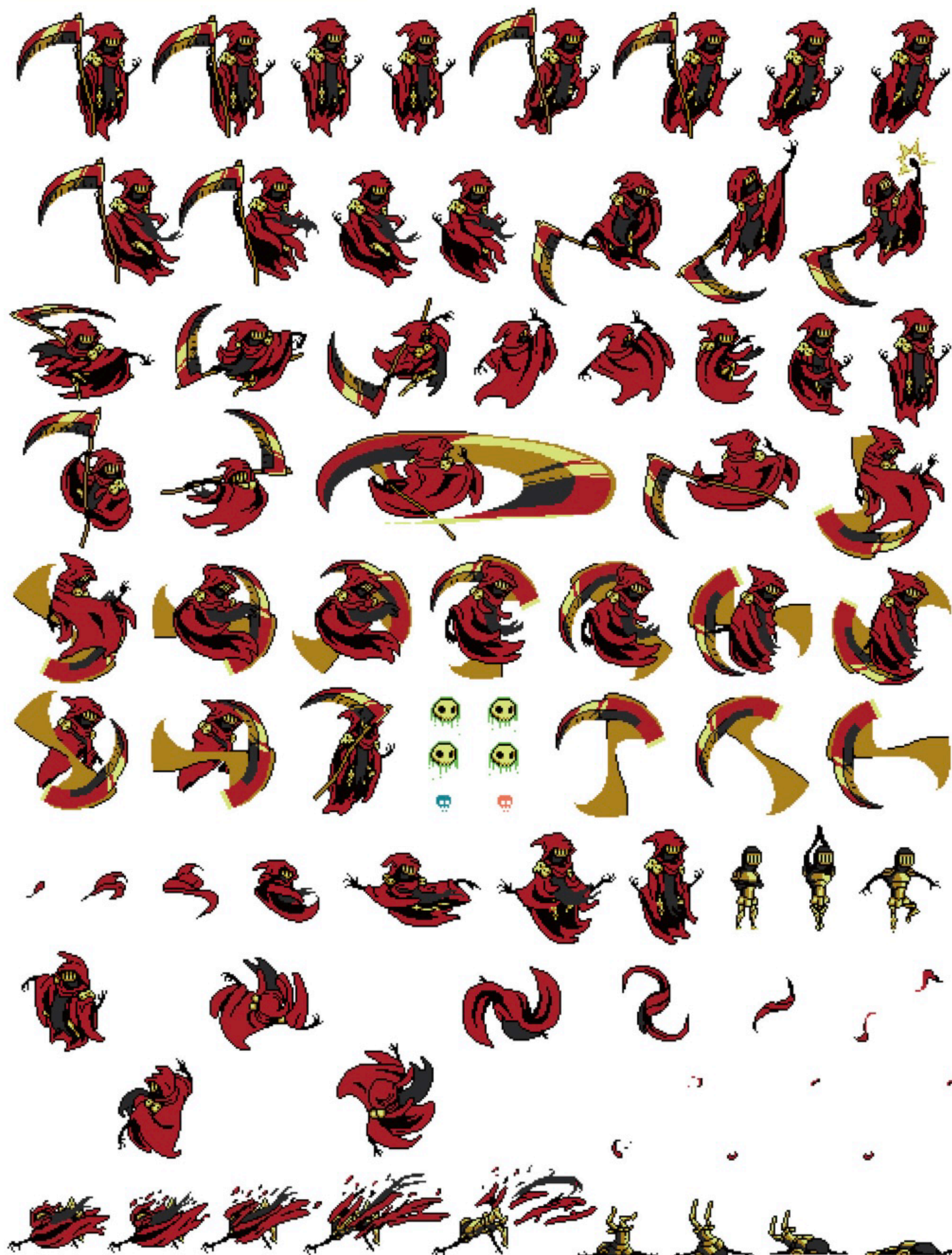


## SPRITE SHEET (TINKER KNIGHT)



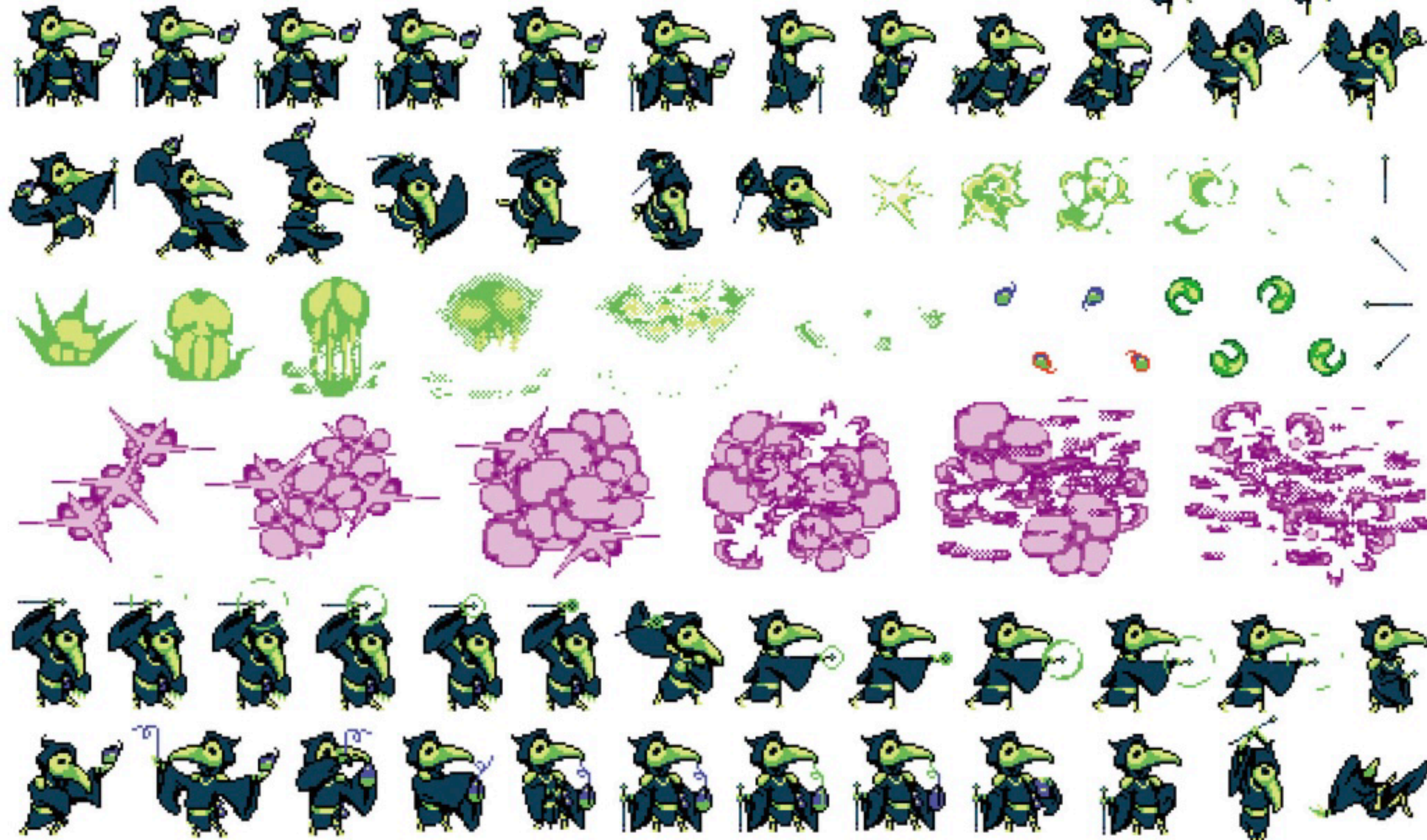


**SPRITE SHEET**  
(SPECTER KNIGHT)

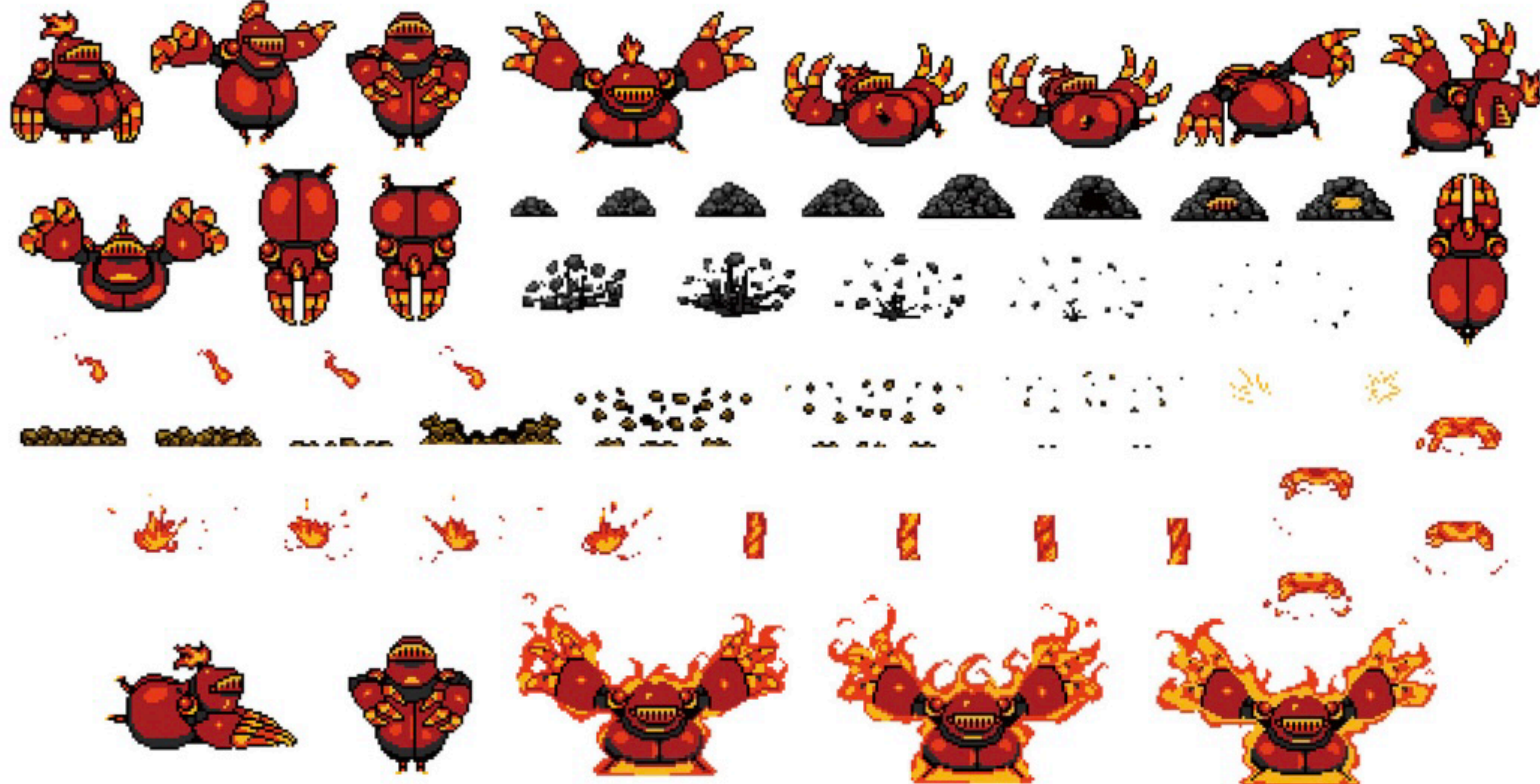




## SPRITE SHEET (PLAGUE KNIGHT)

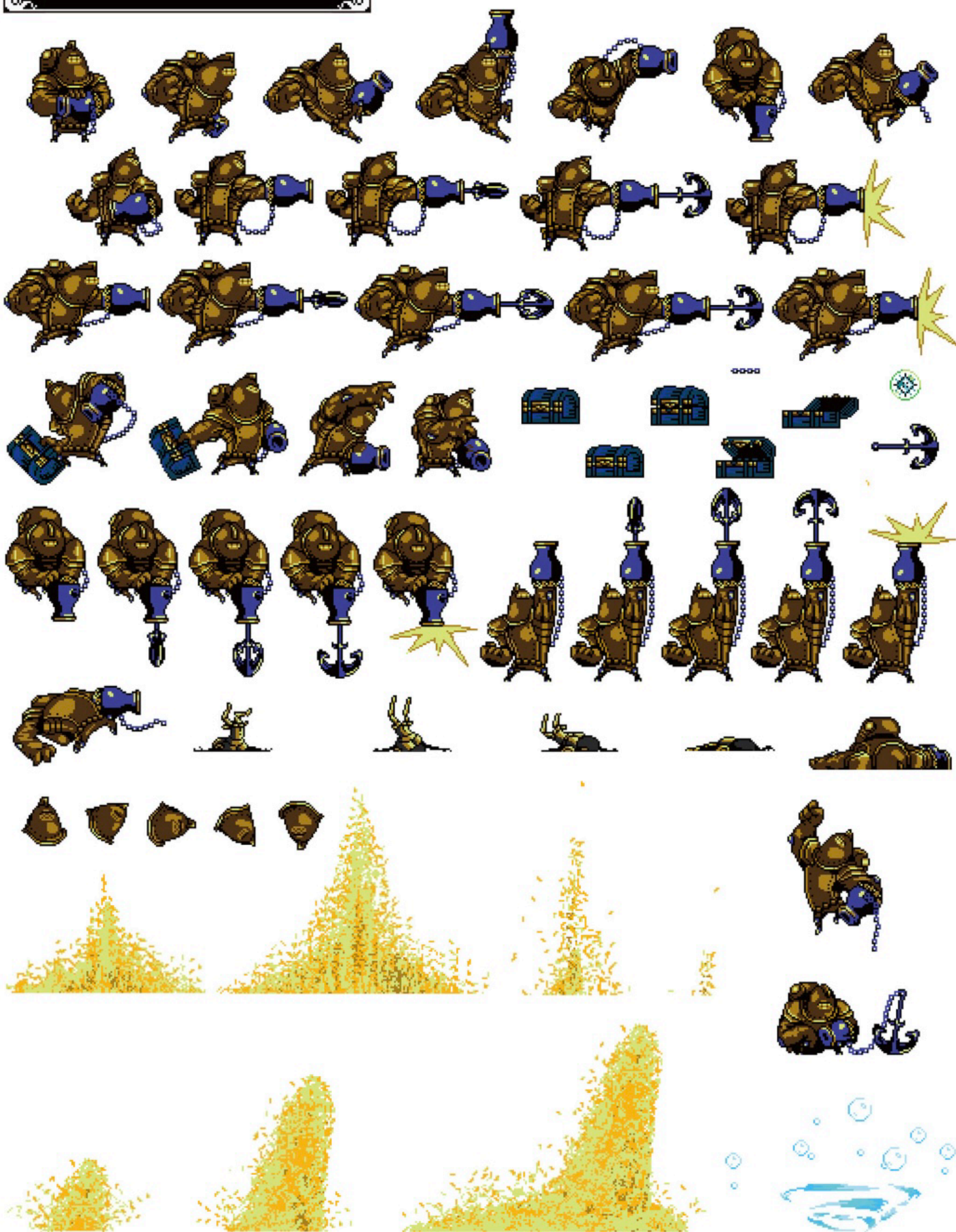


**SPRITE SHEET**  
(MOLE KNIGHT)



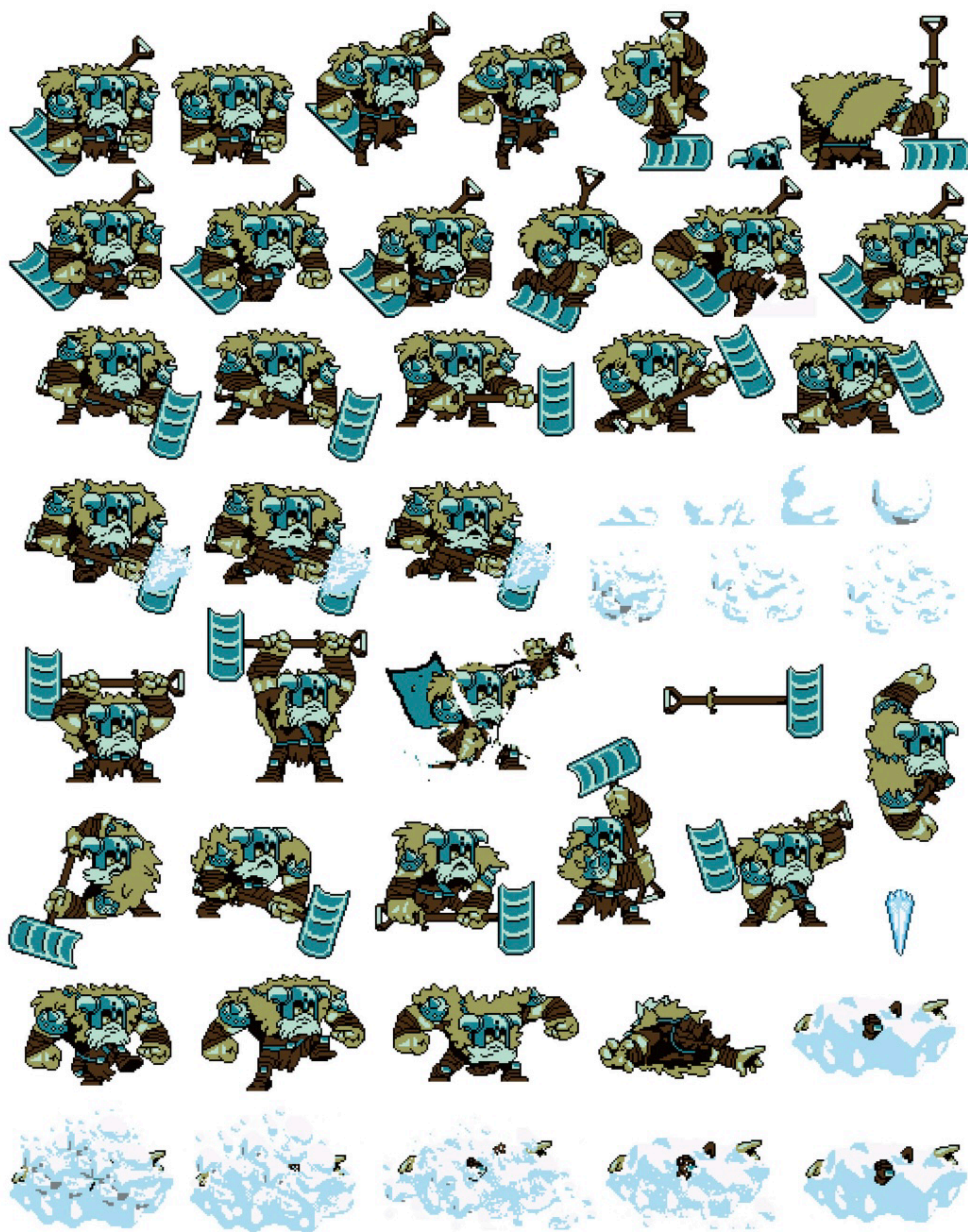


**SPRITE SHEET**  
(TREASURE KNIGHT)





# SPRITE SHEET (POLAR KNIGHT)

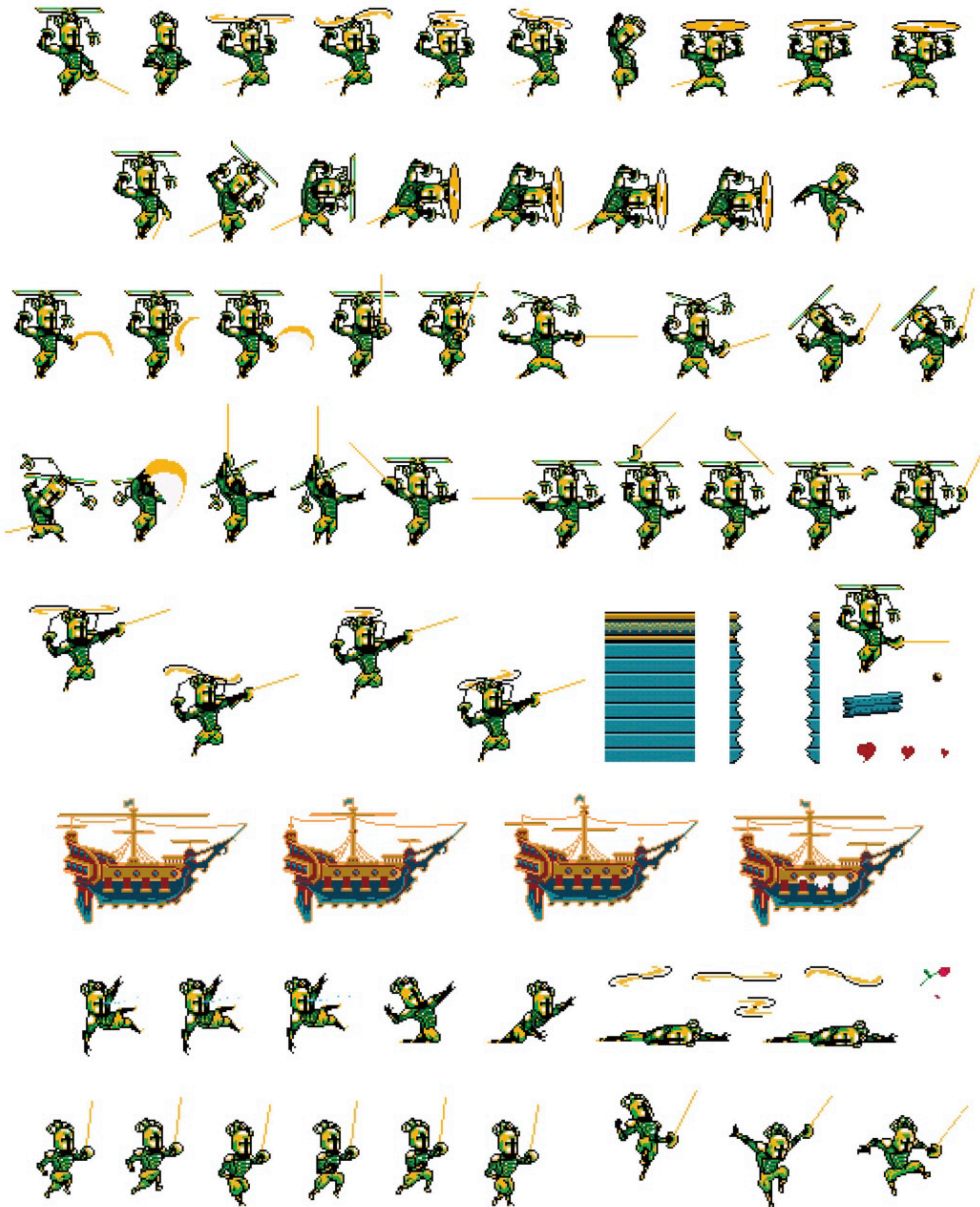


ARCHIVES





# SPRITE SHEET (PROPELLER KNIGHT)

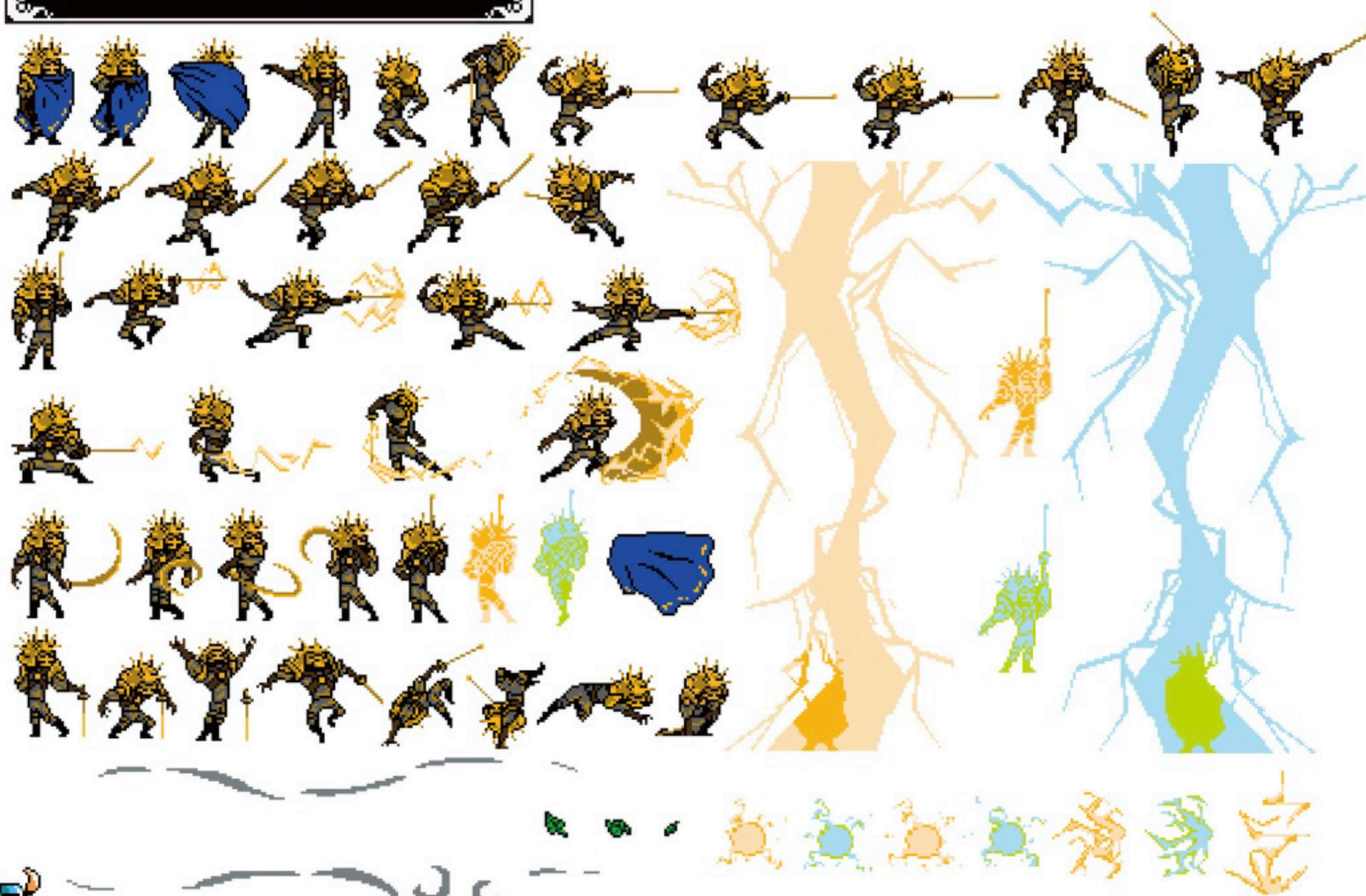




# SPRITE SHEET (REIZE SEATLAN)

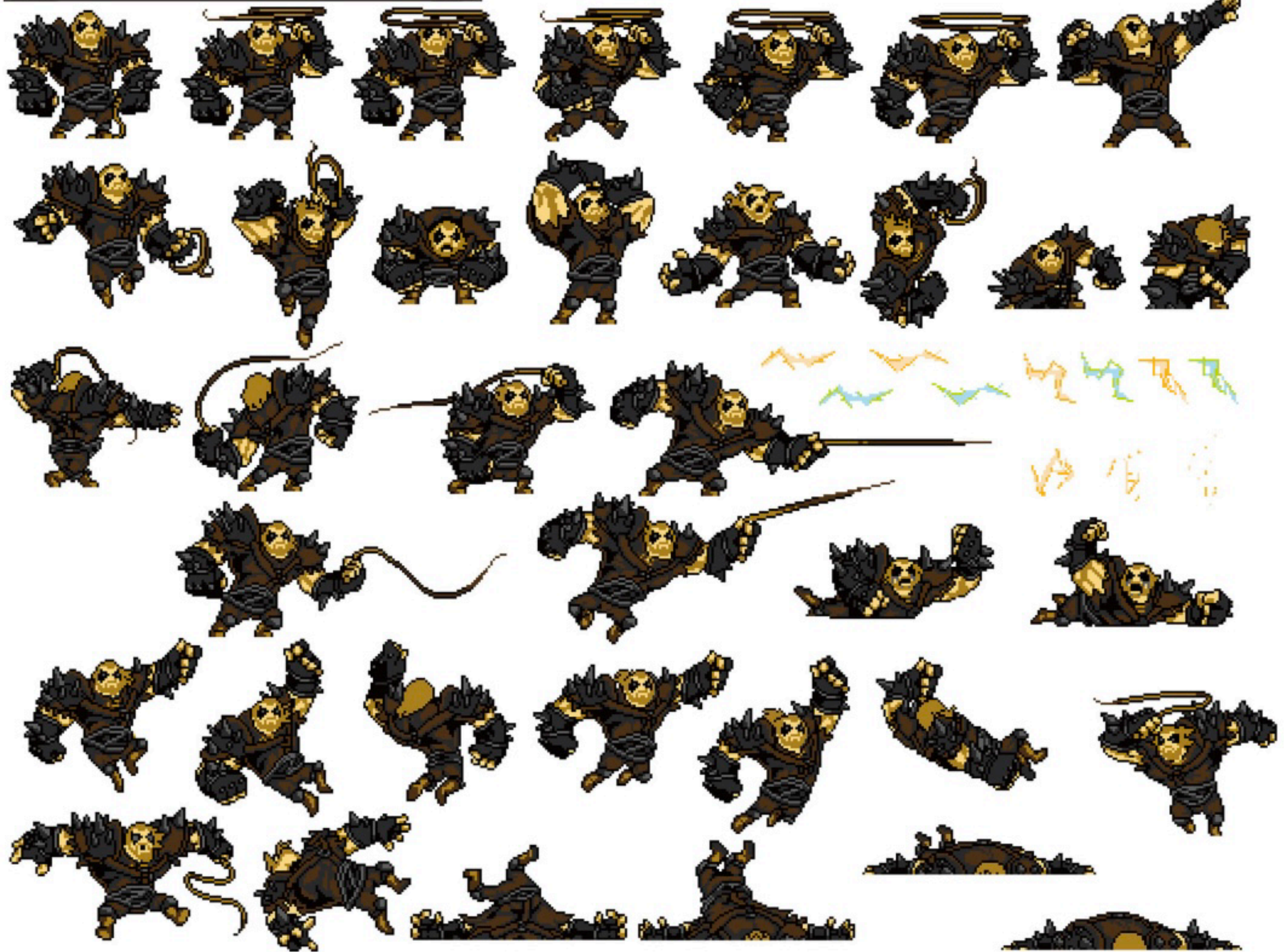


# SPRITE SHEET (PHANTOM STRIKER)





# SPRITE SHEET (THE BAZ)



# SPRITE SHEET (MR. HAT)



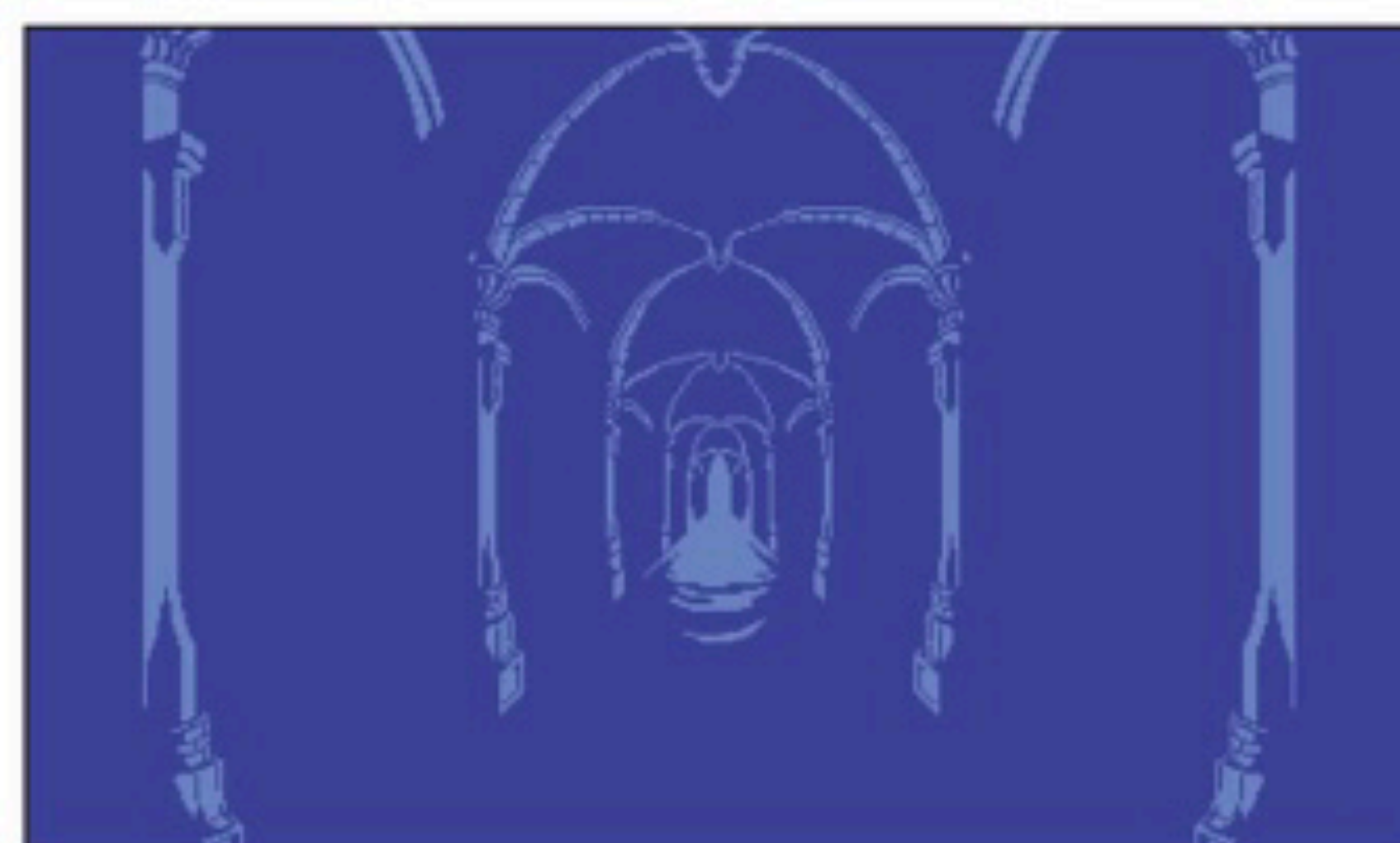
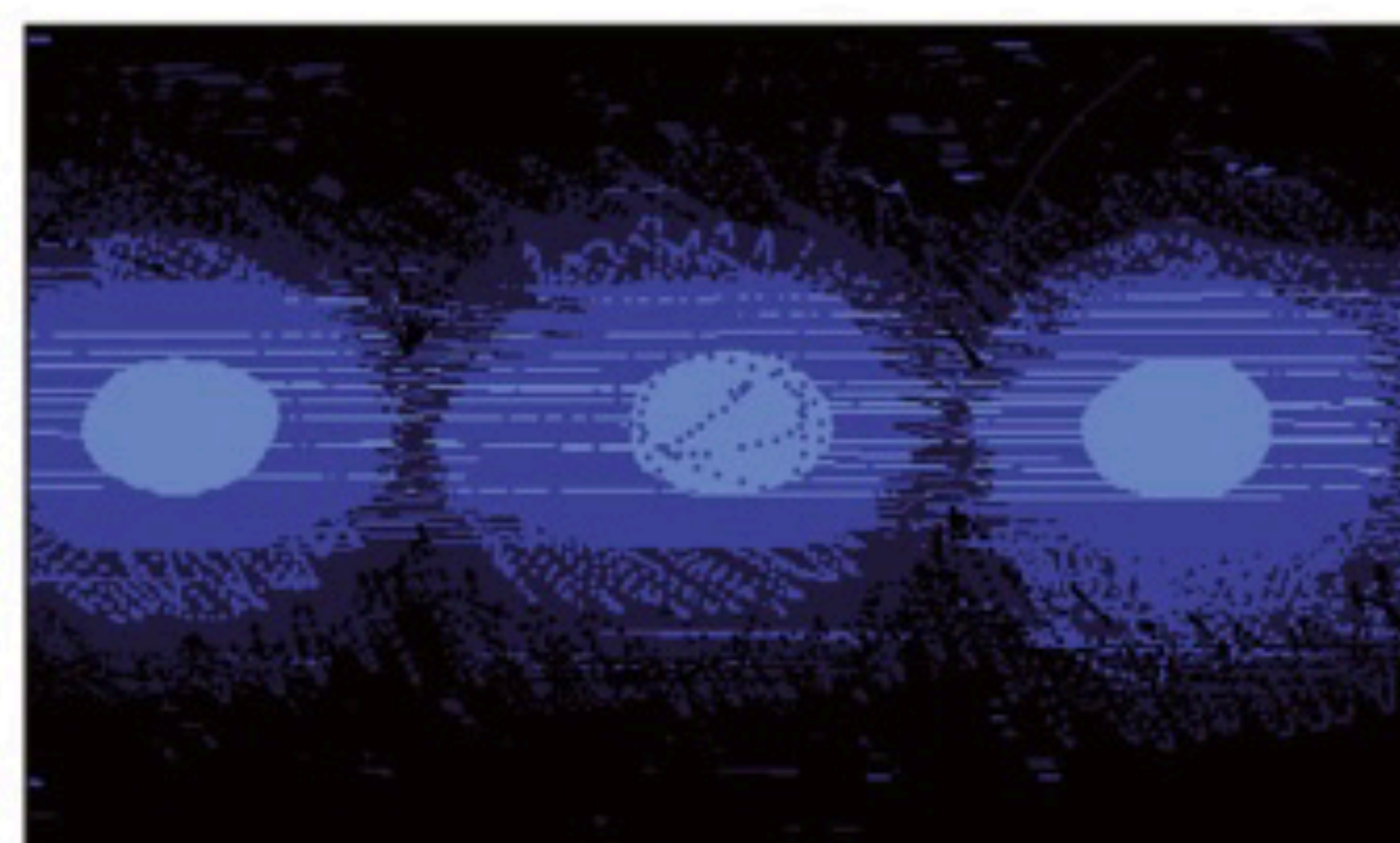


# BACKGROUND DEVELOPMENT

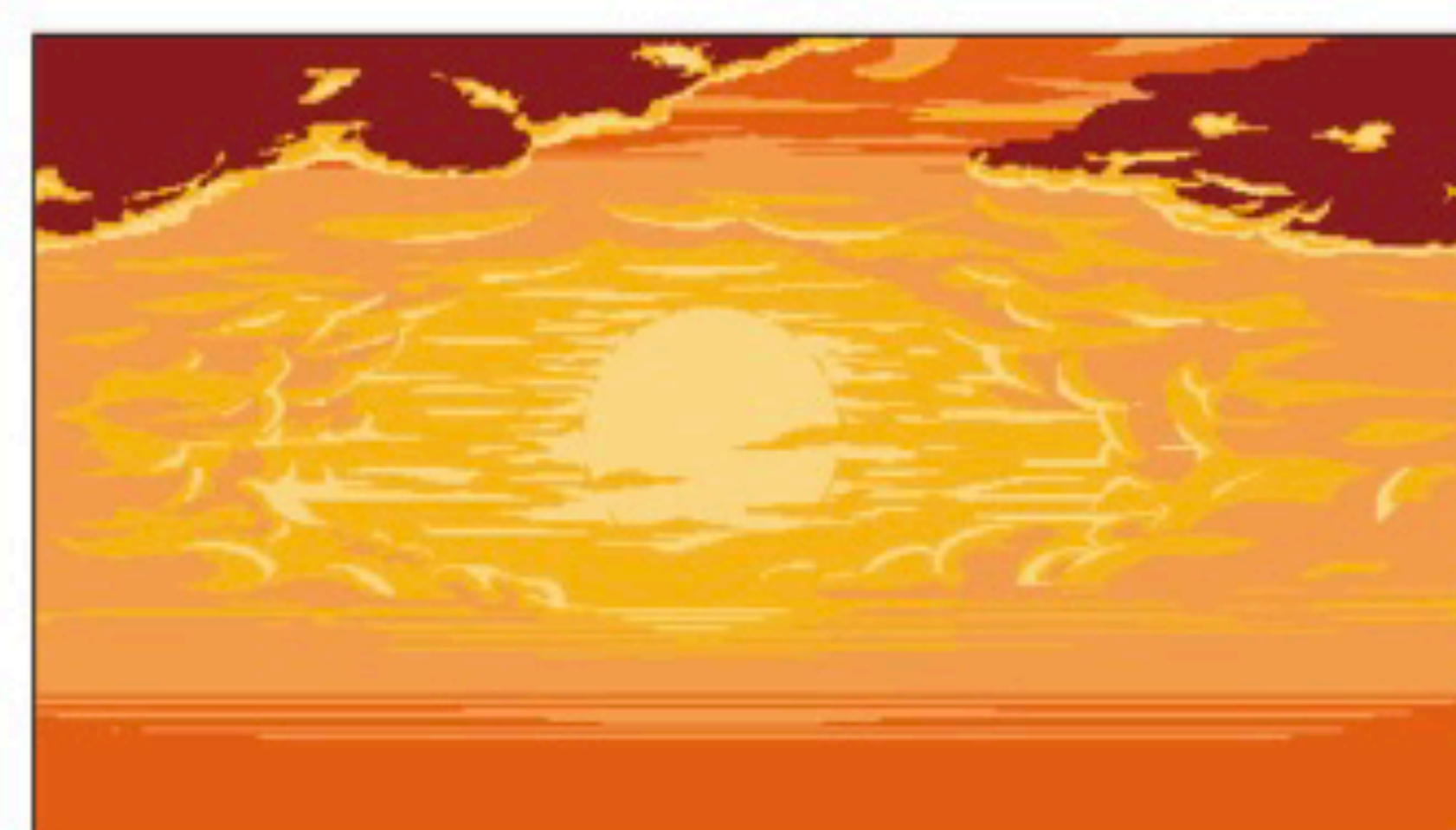
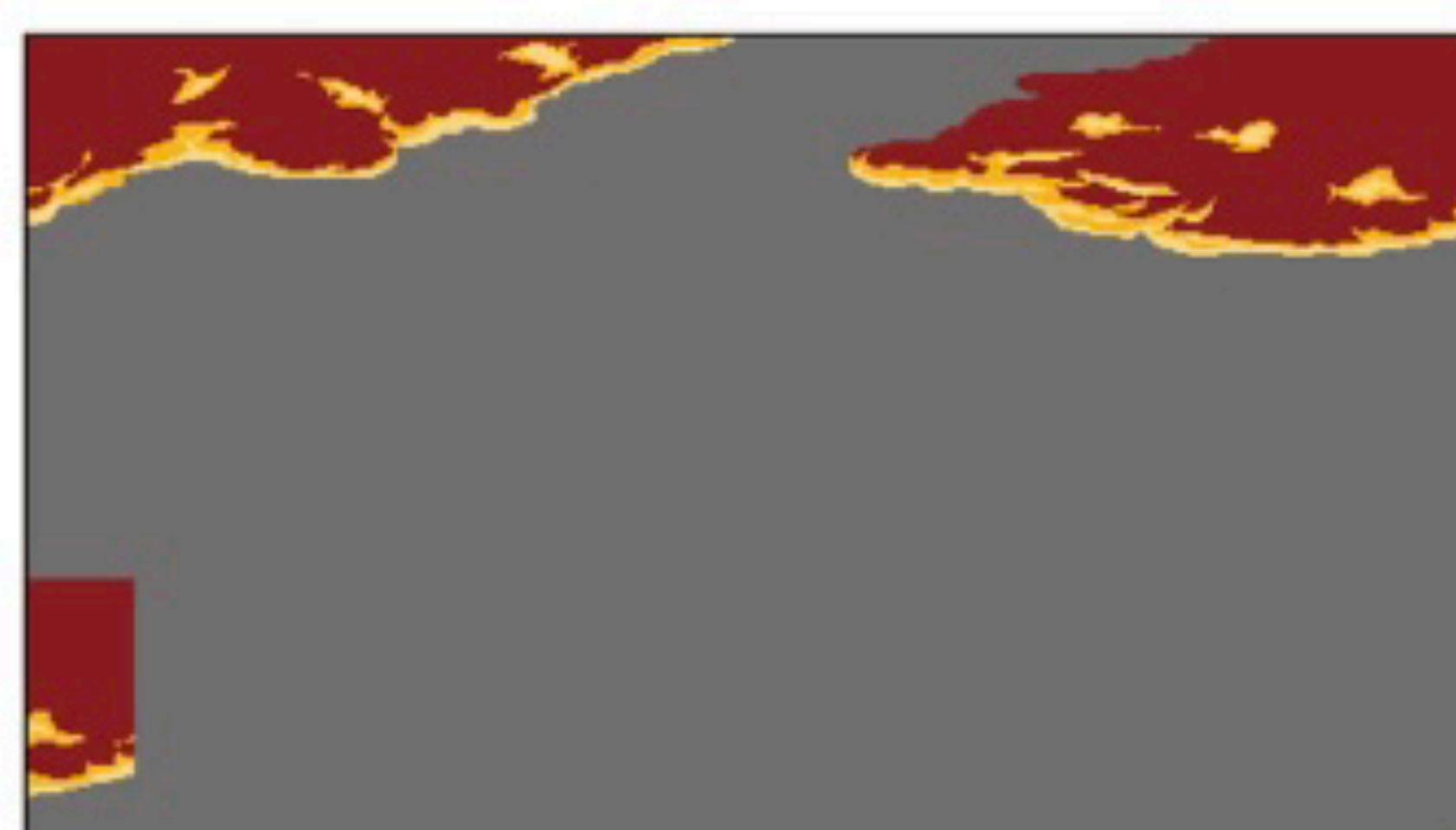
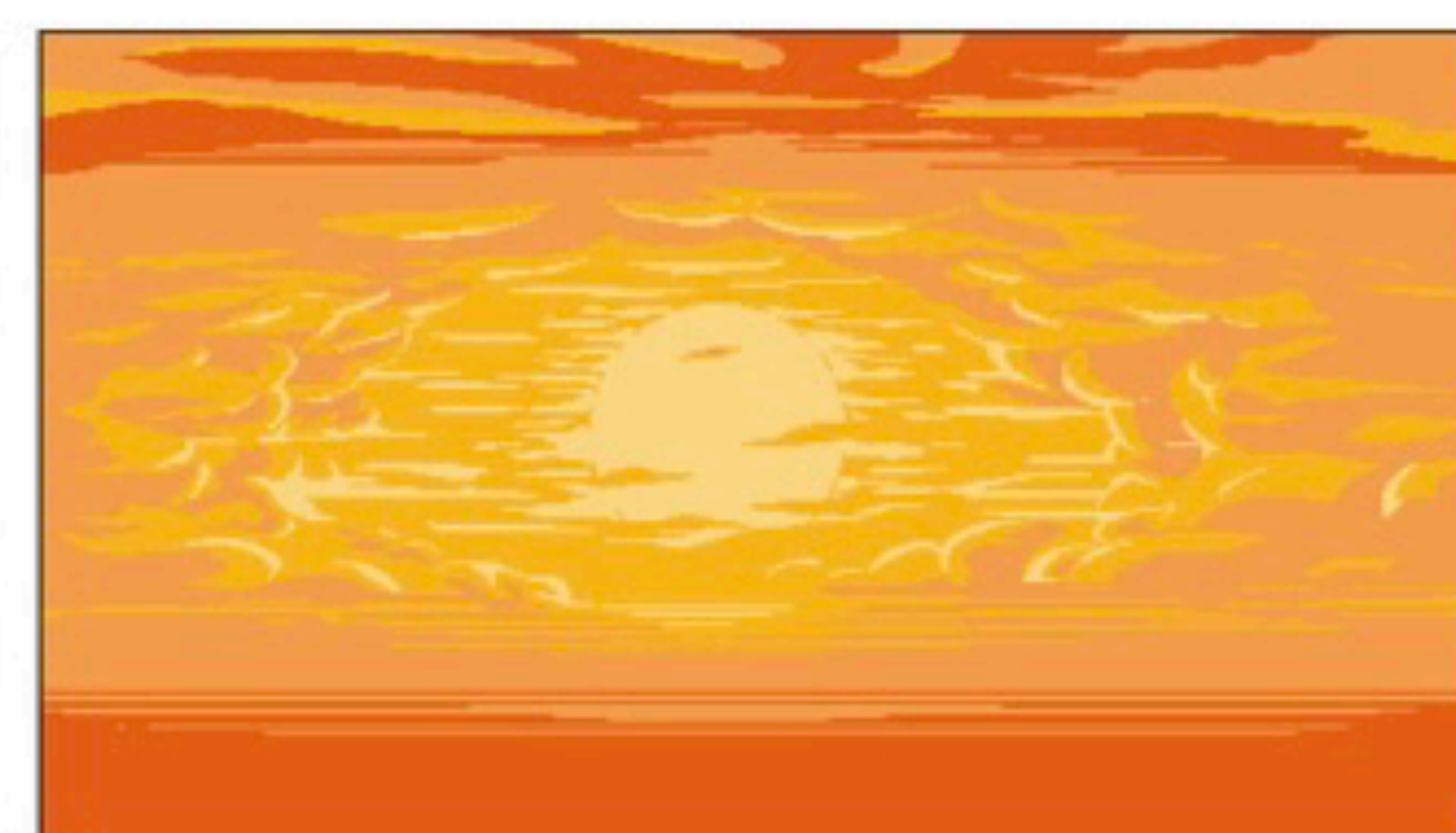
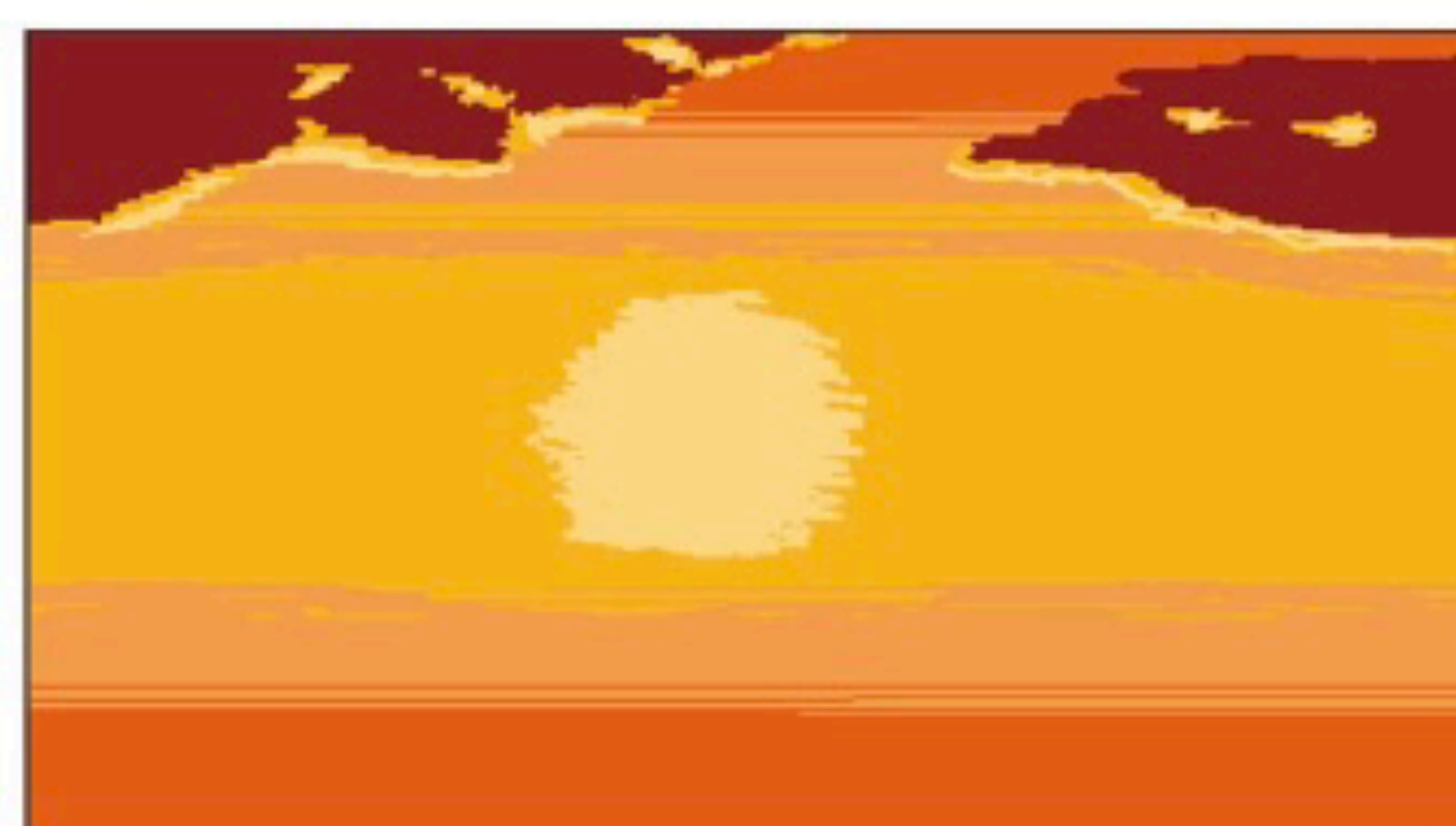
## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*We worked hard to make sure that every stage has a unique, memorable palette and color scheme.*

### EXPLODATORIUM (PLAGUE KNIGHT STAGE)

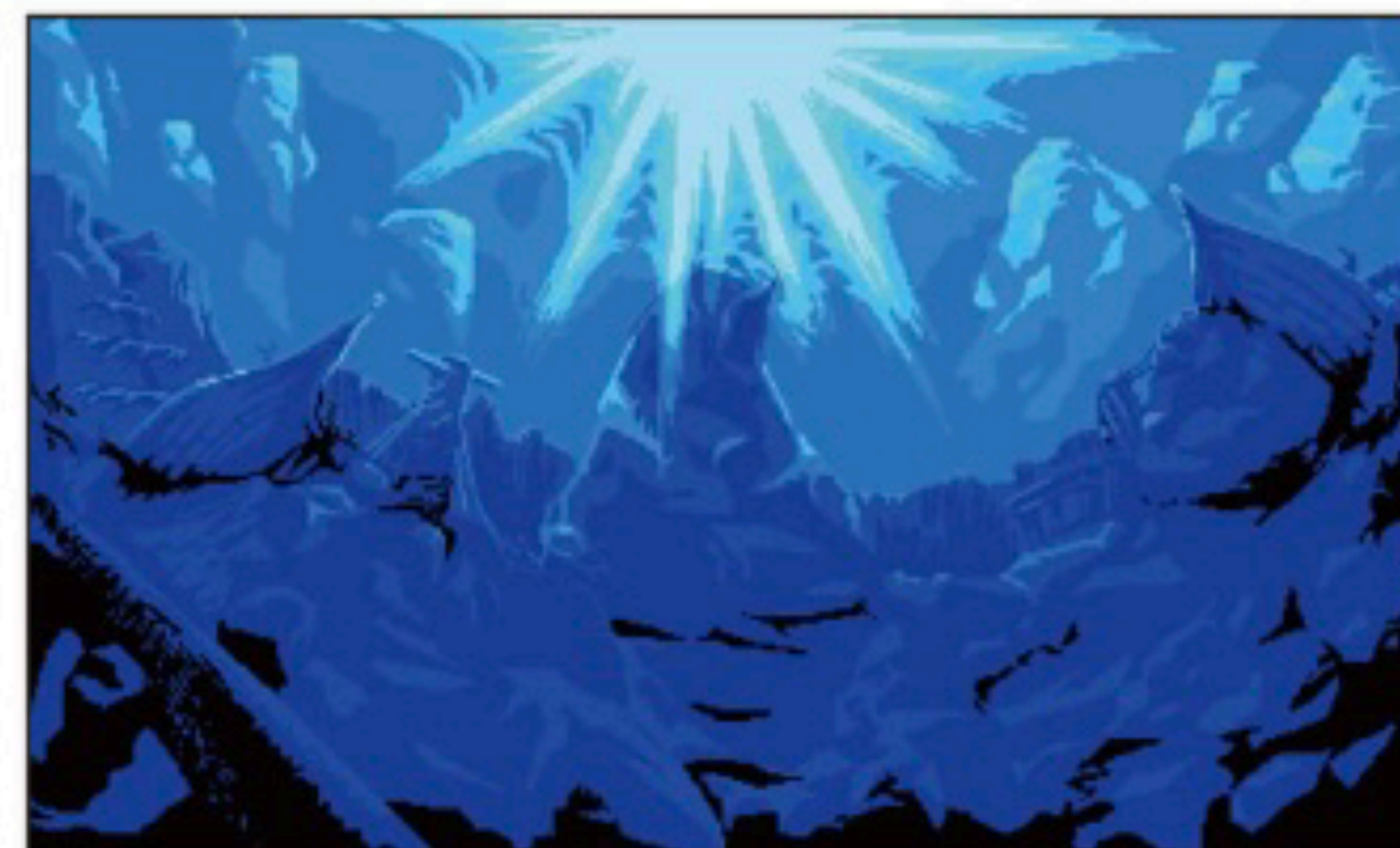
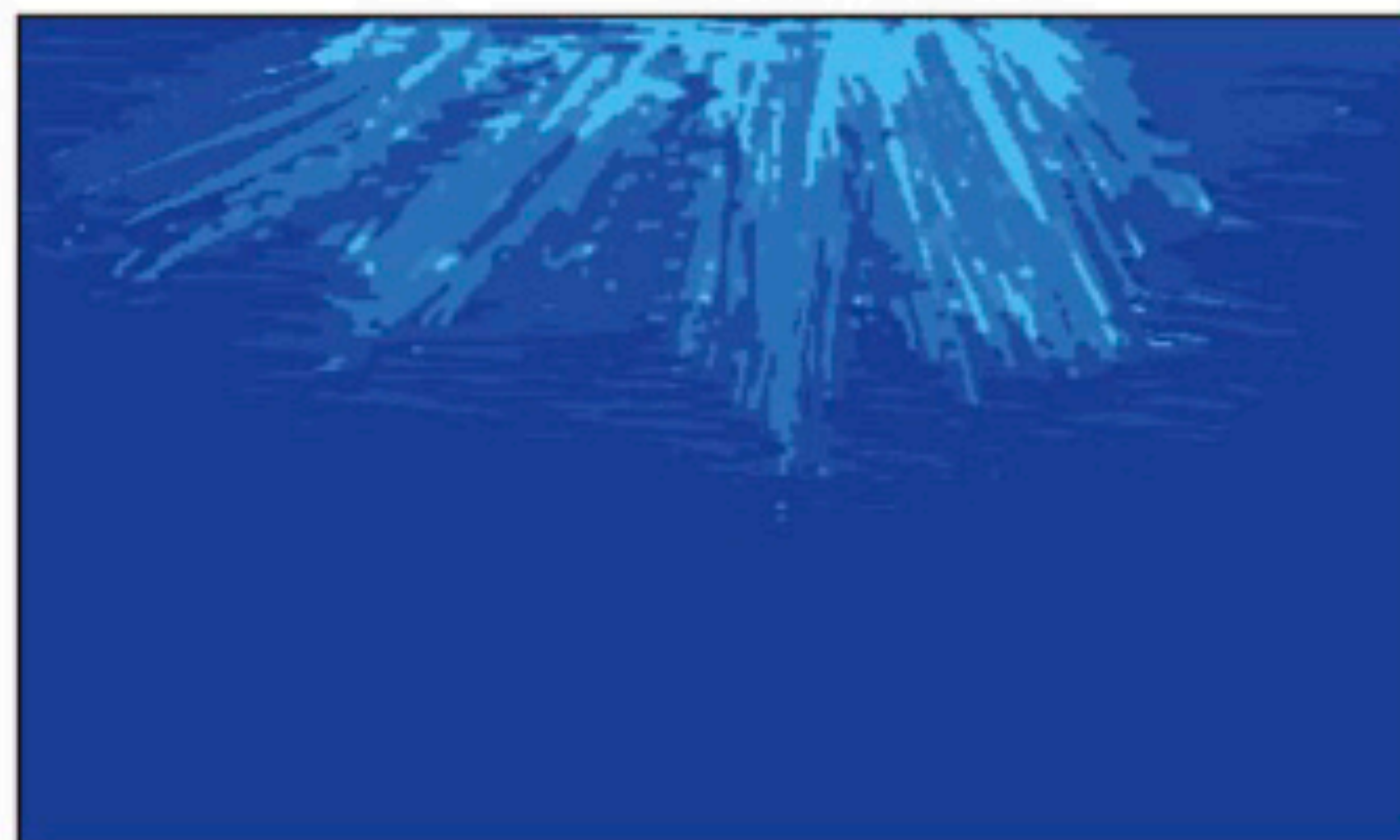
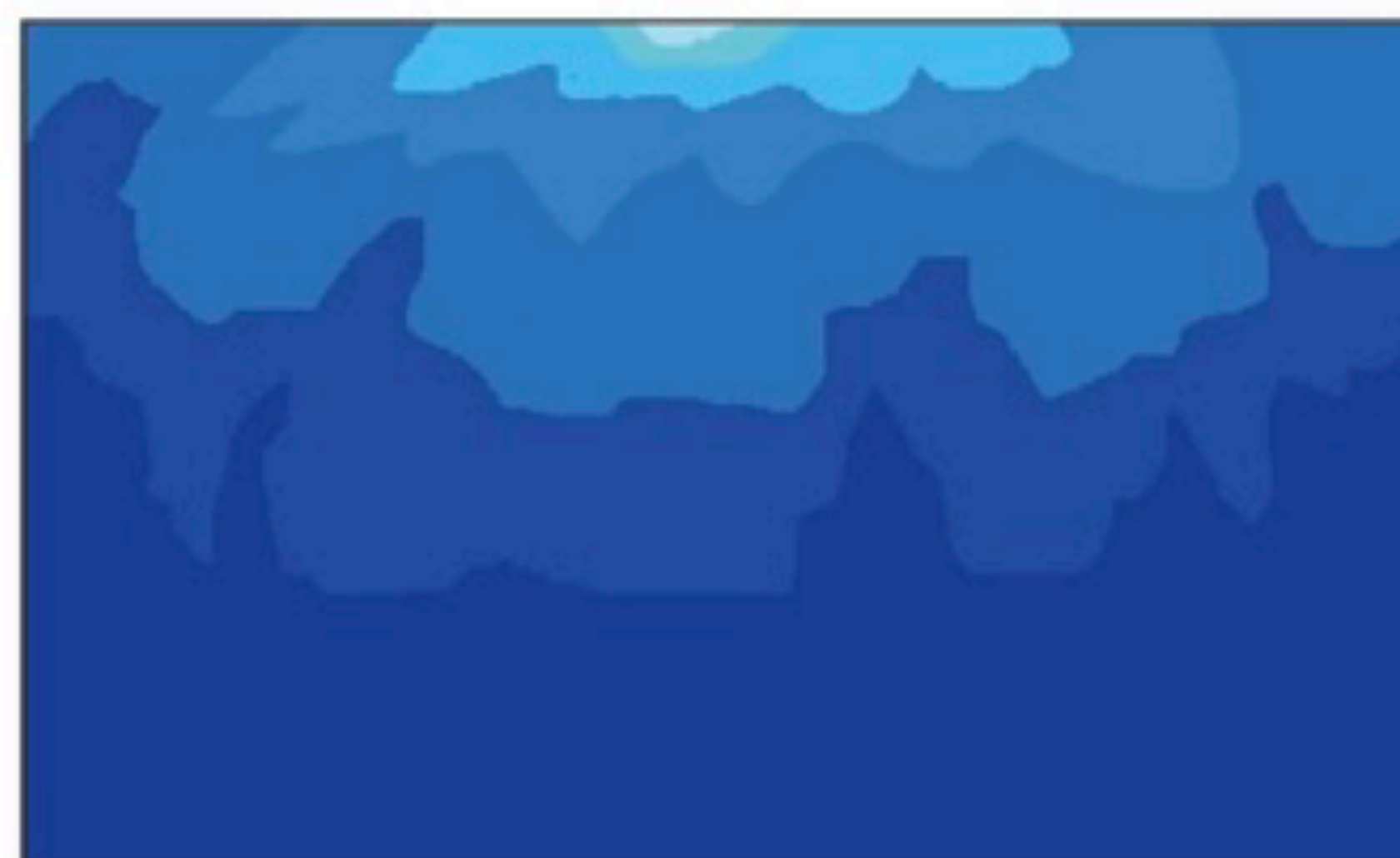


### FLYING MACHINE (PROPELLER KNIGHT STAGE)

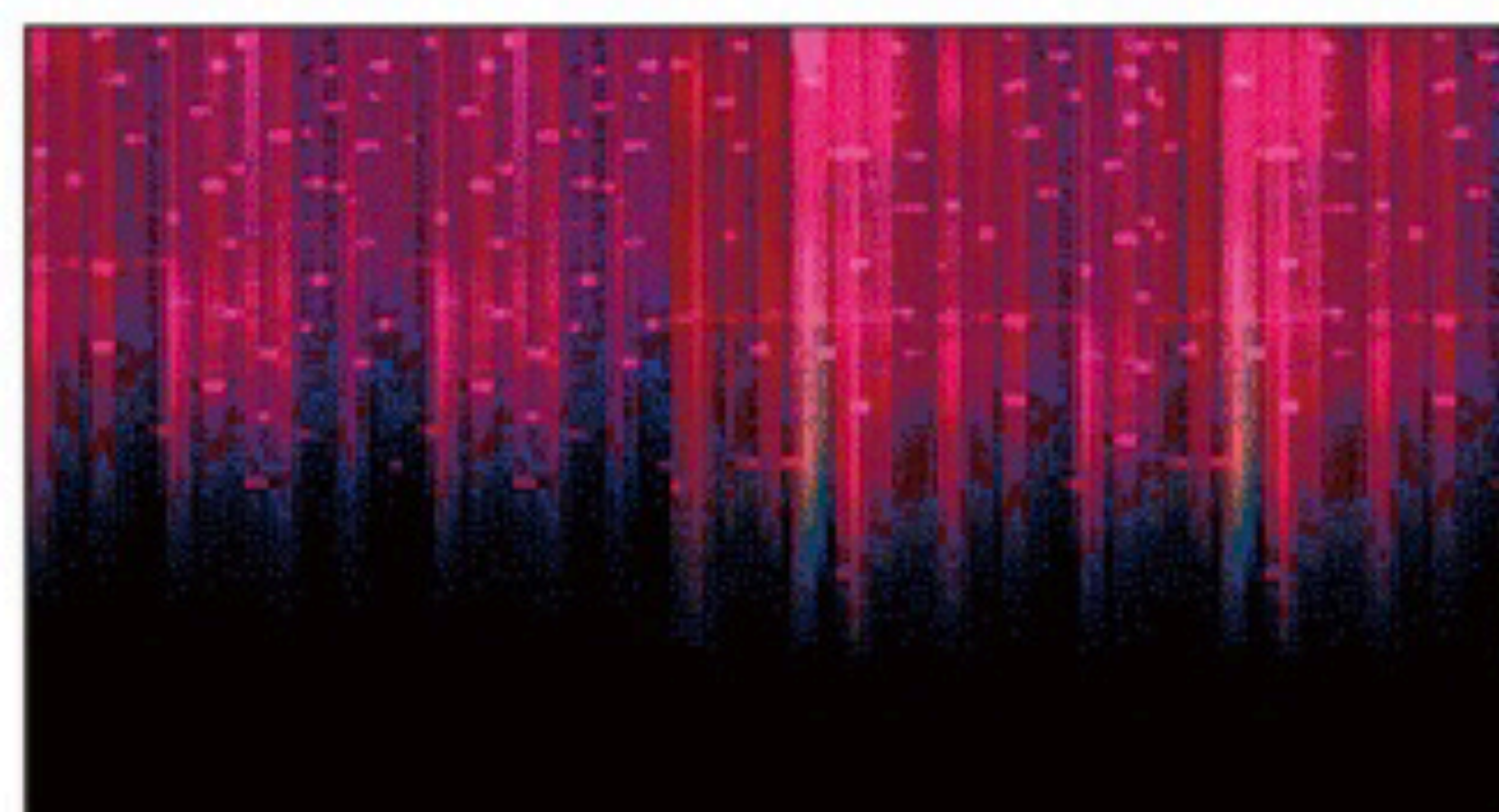




## IRON WHALE (TREASURE KNIGHT STAGE)

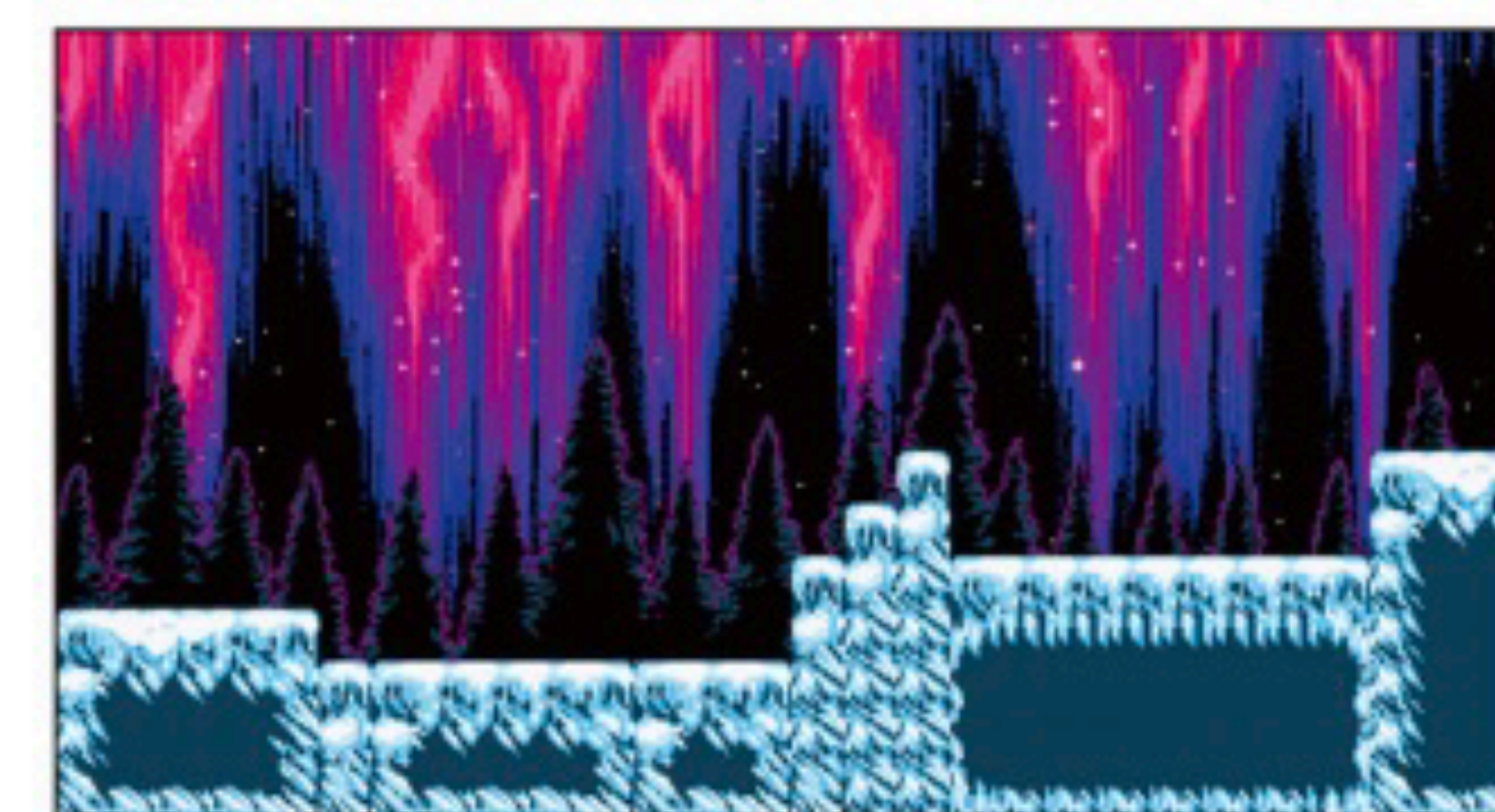
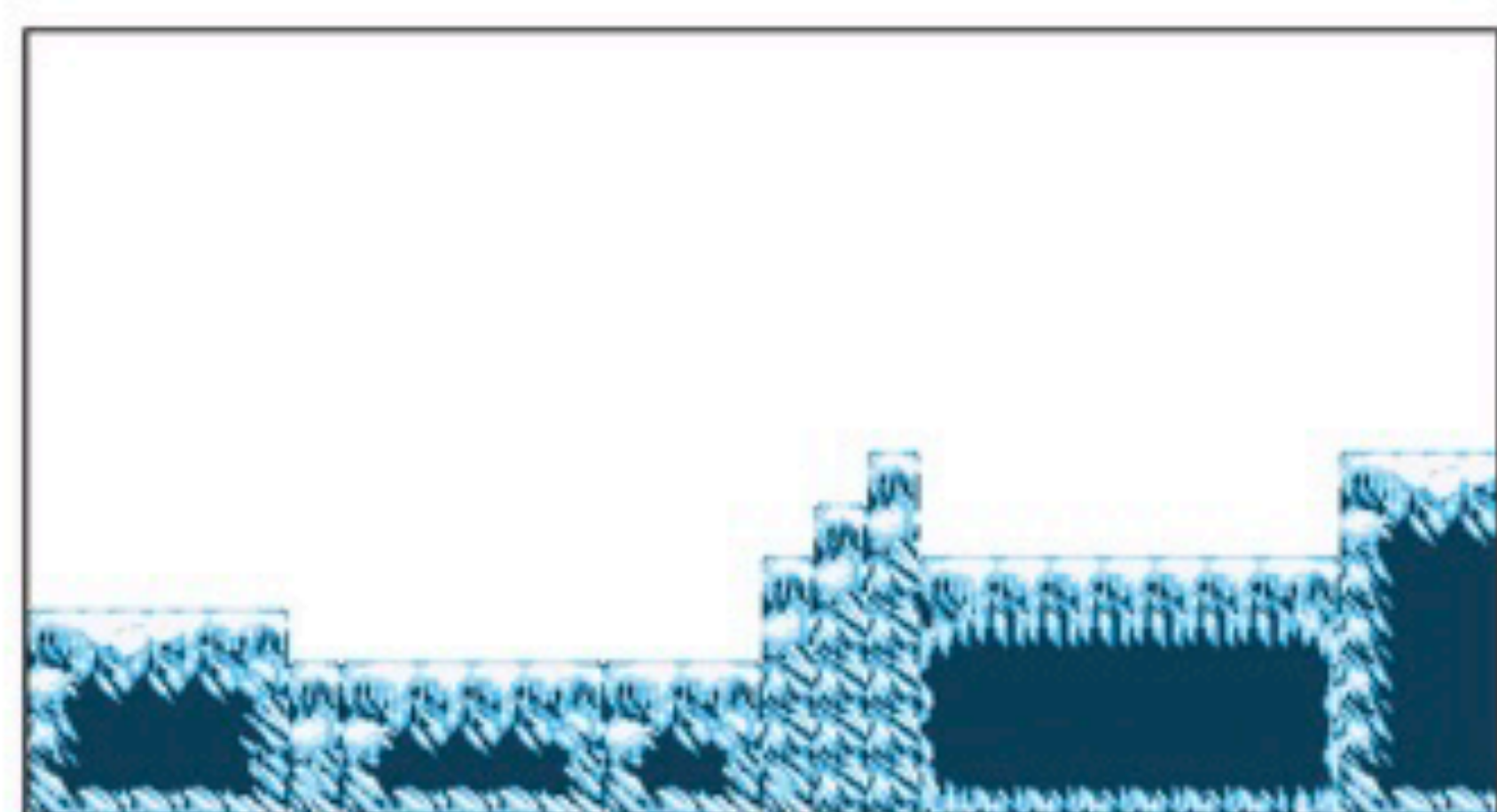
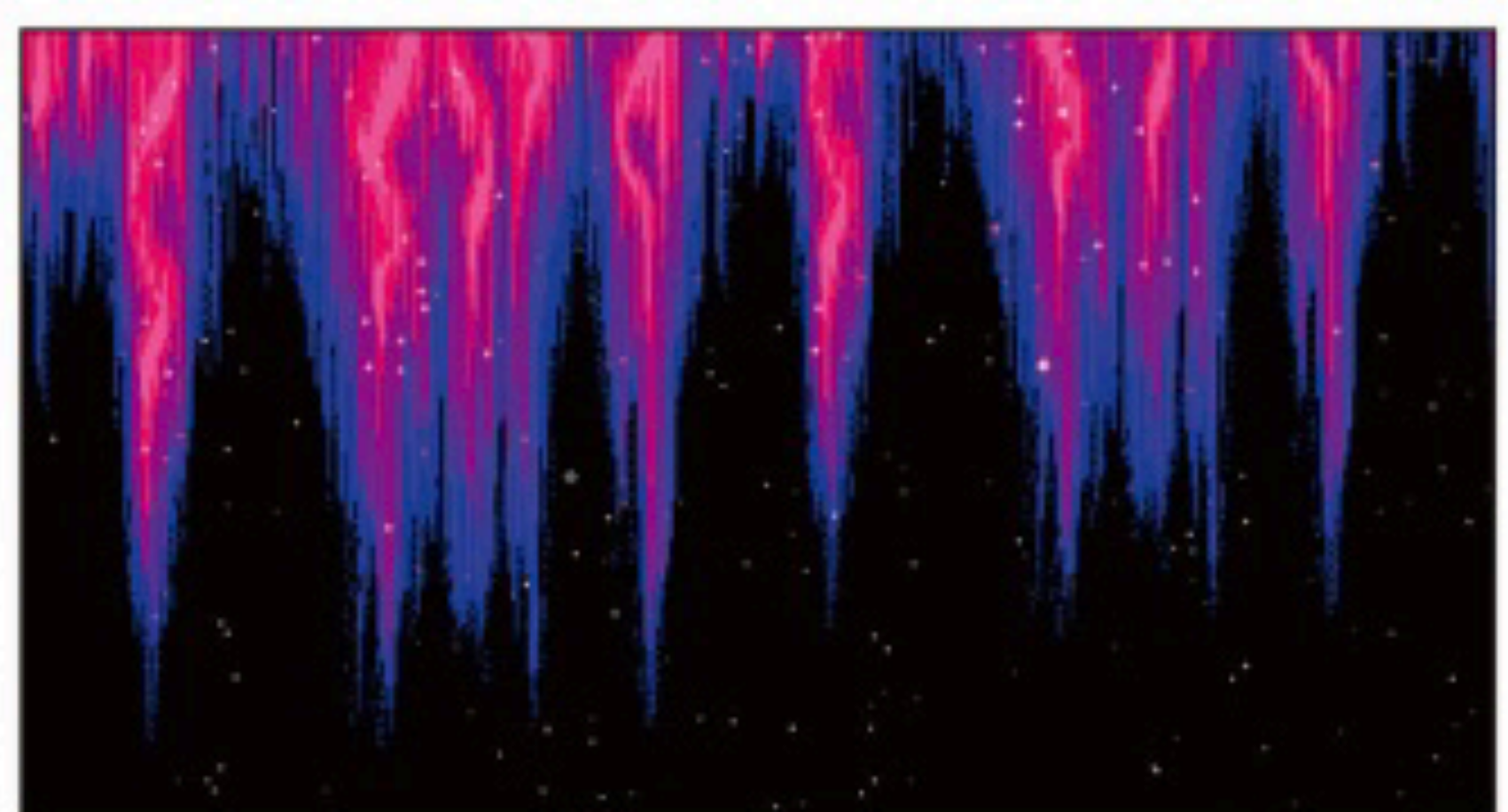
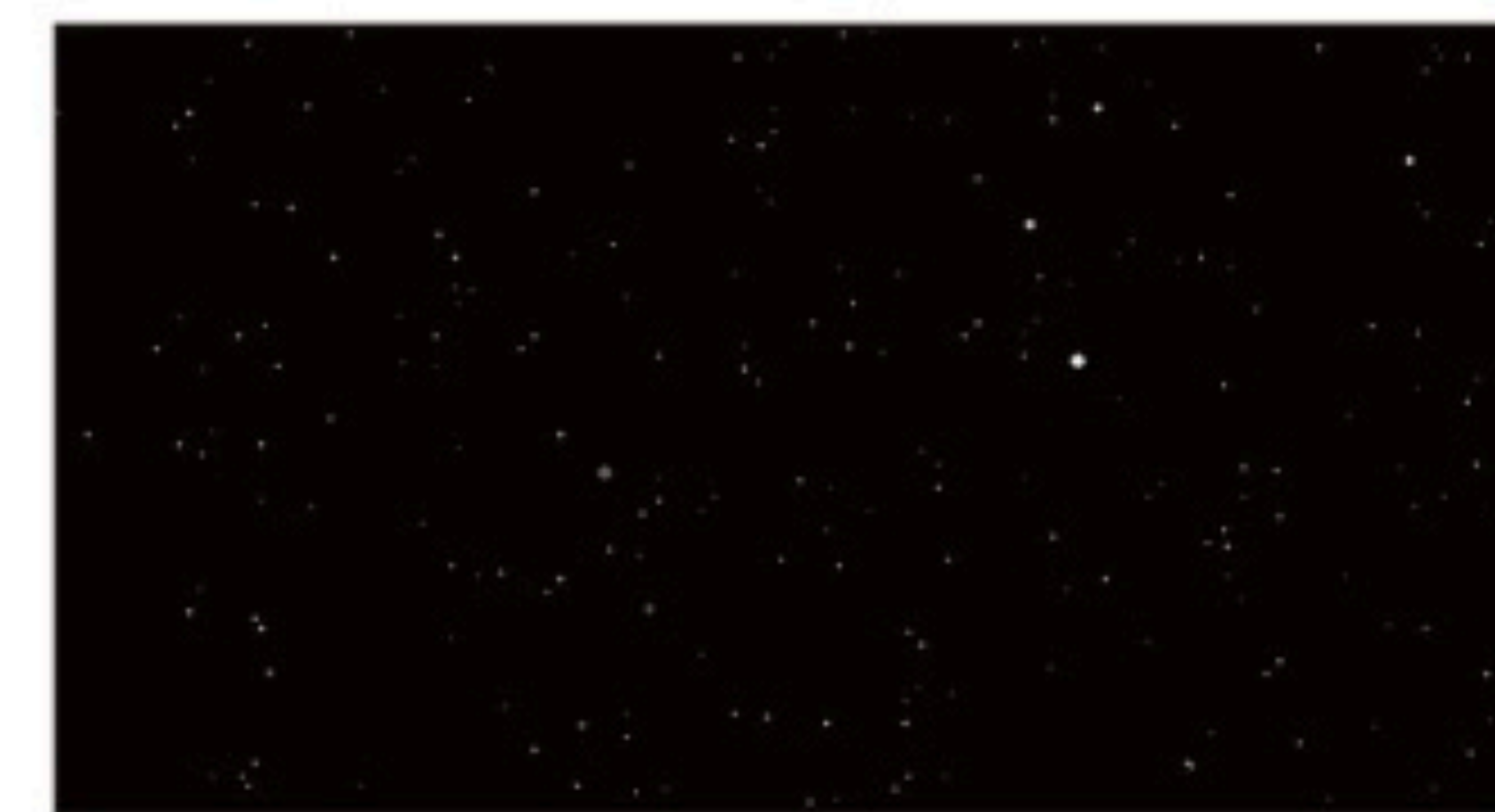
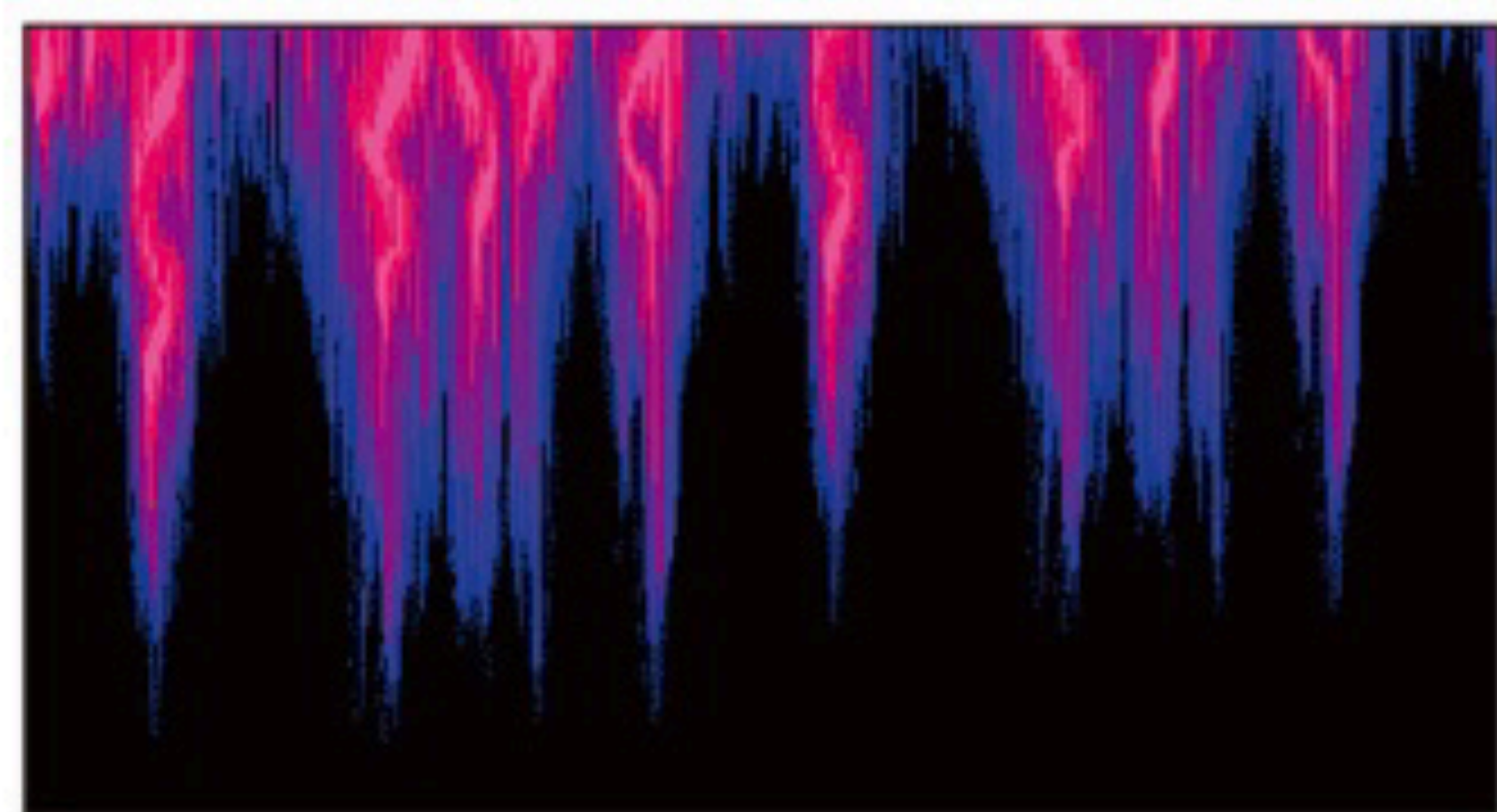
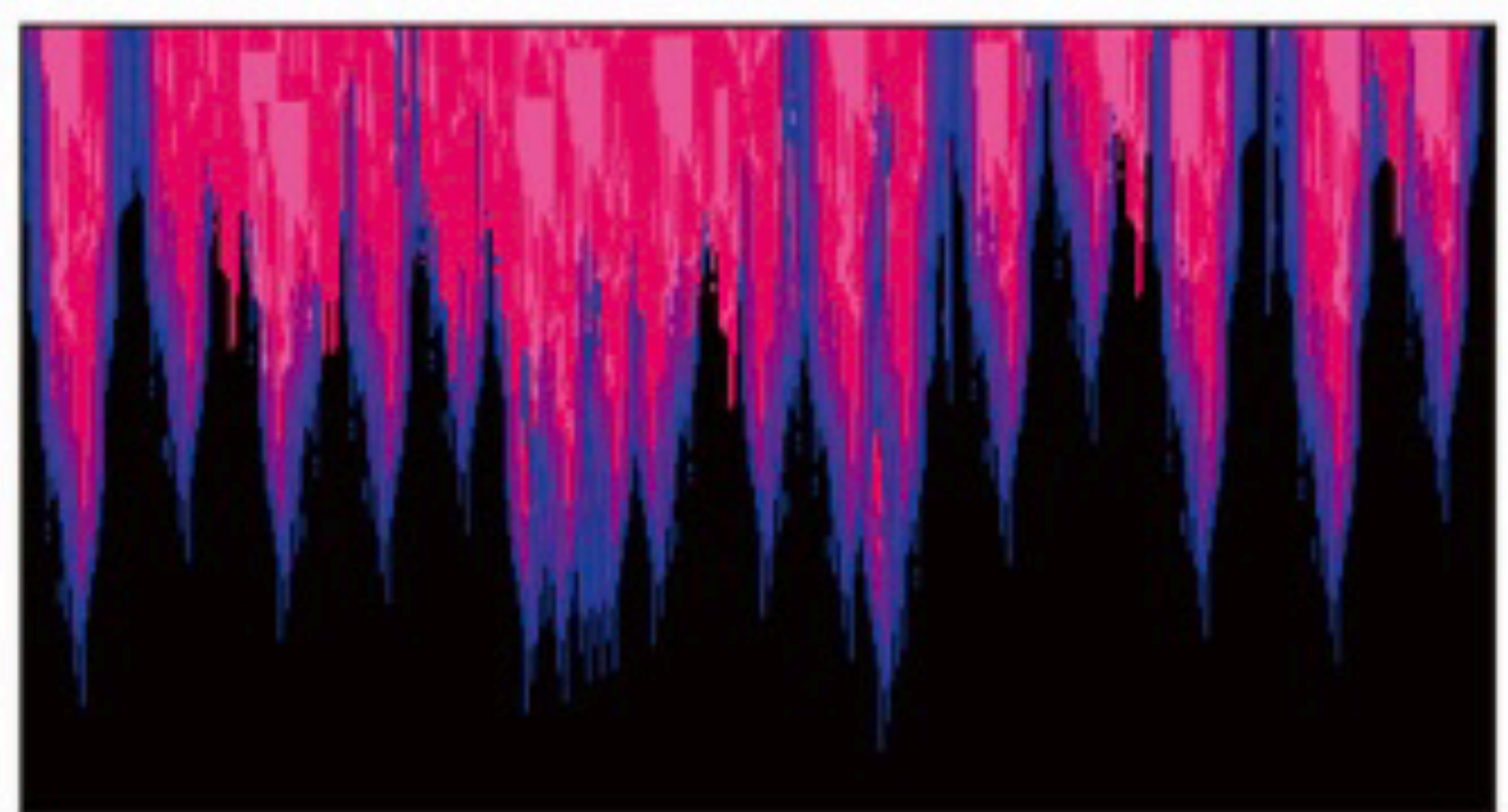
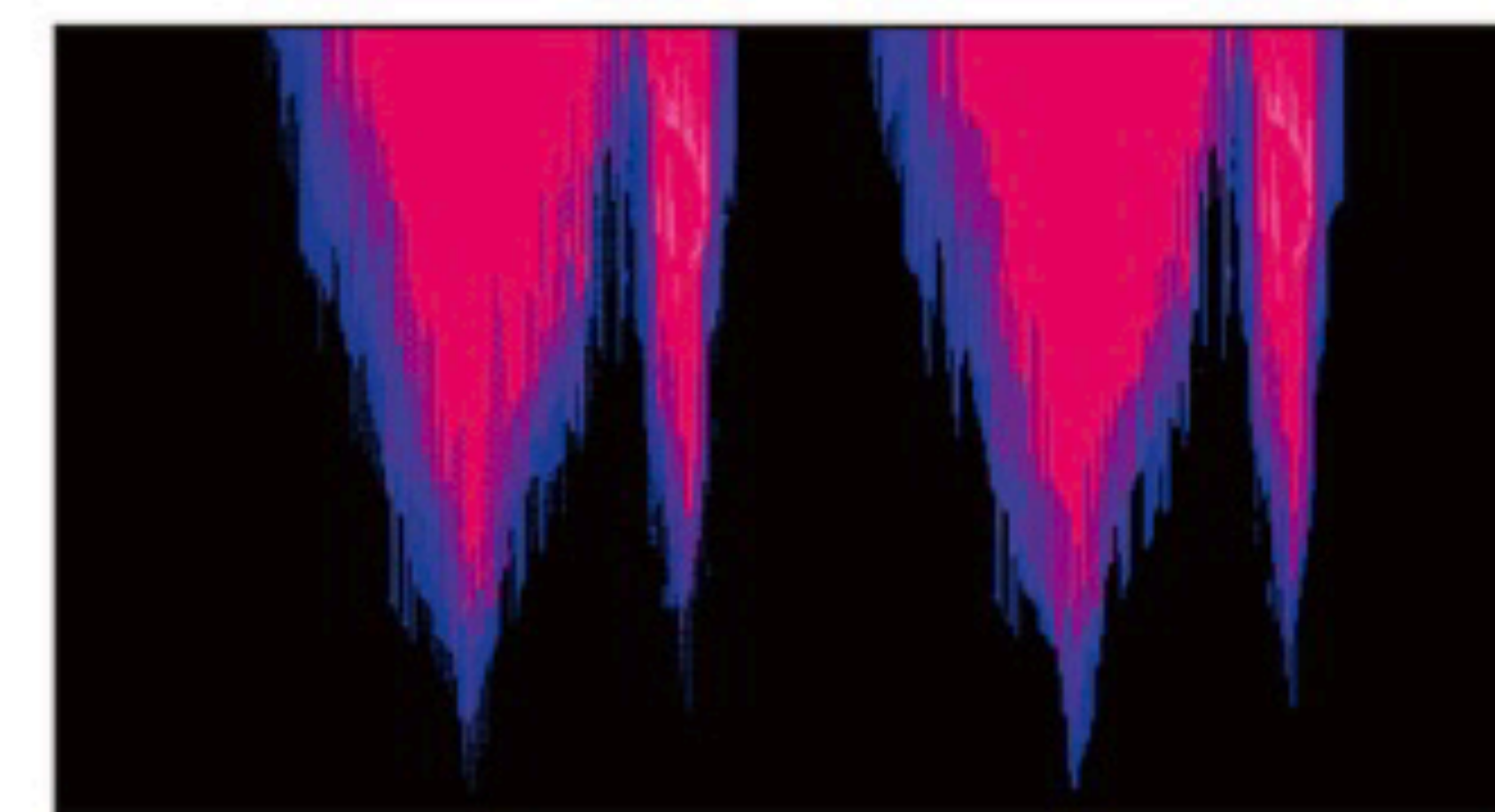
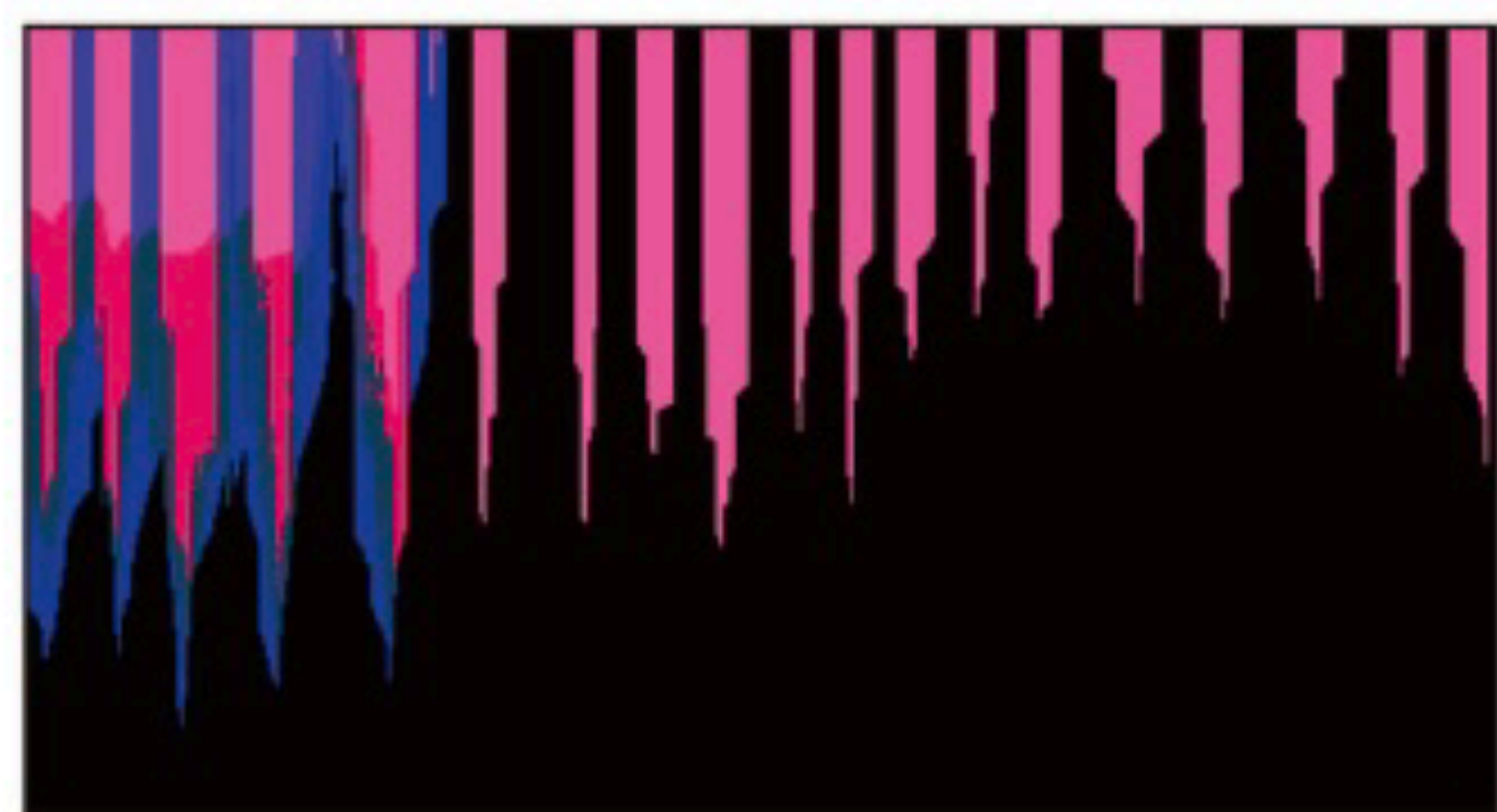


## STRANDED SHIP (POLAR KNIGHT STAGE)



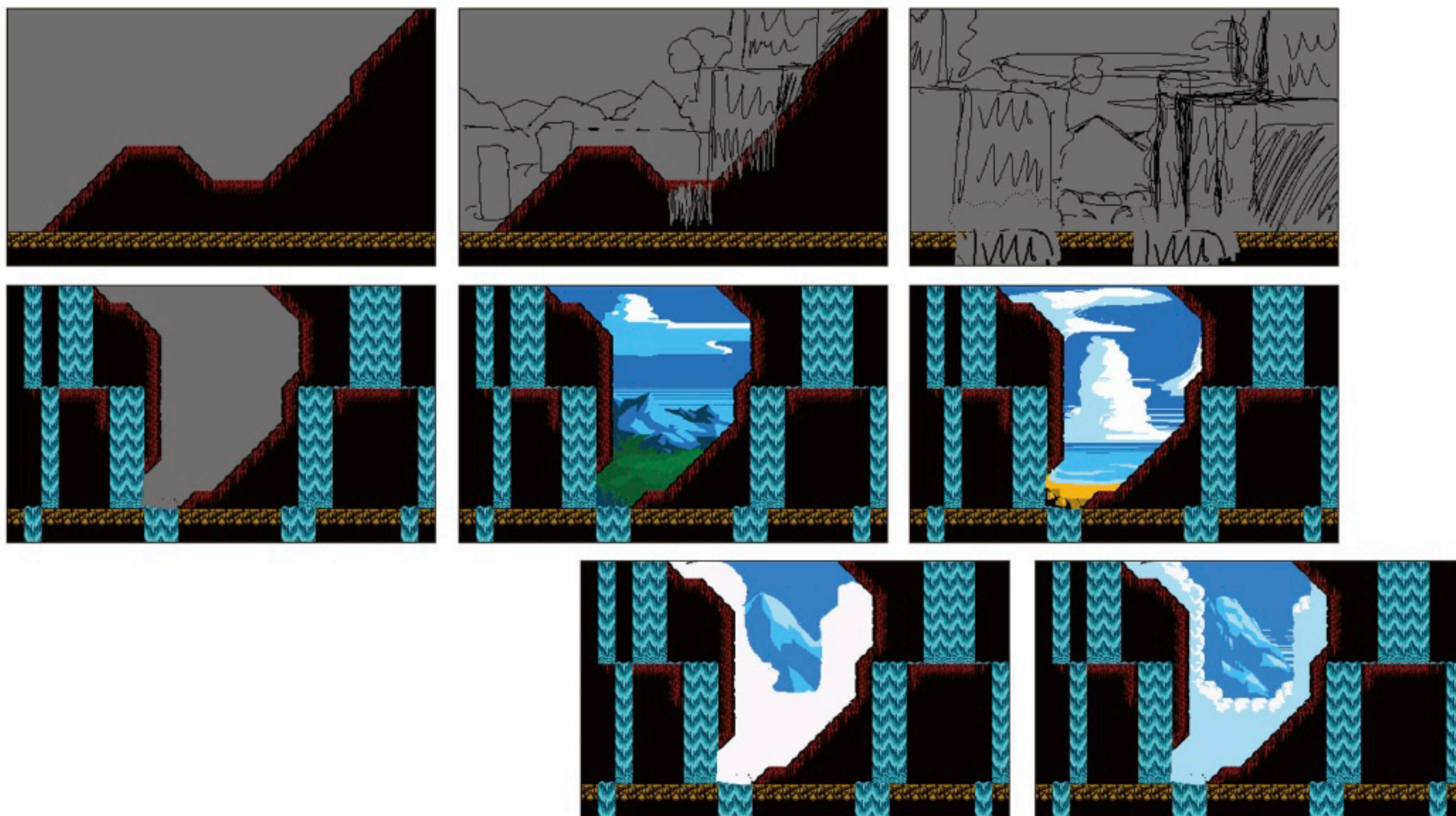
### DEV. COMMENTARY

All backgrounds start off as quick color sketches. The hardest one to get right was the aurora borealis in the sky of Polar Knight's stage.

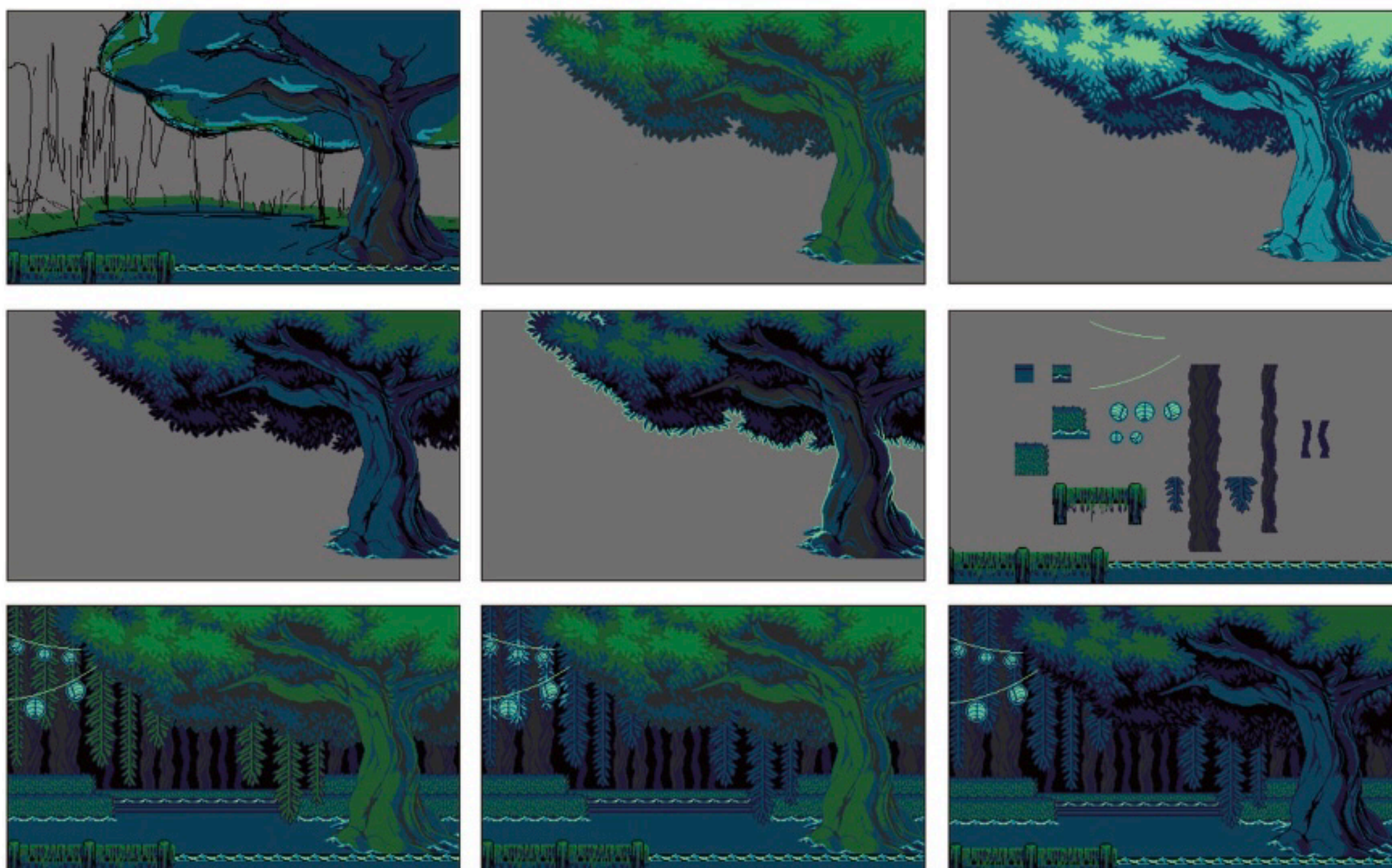




# THE MOUNTAINTOP (REIZE BATTLE)

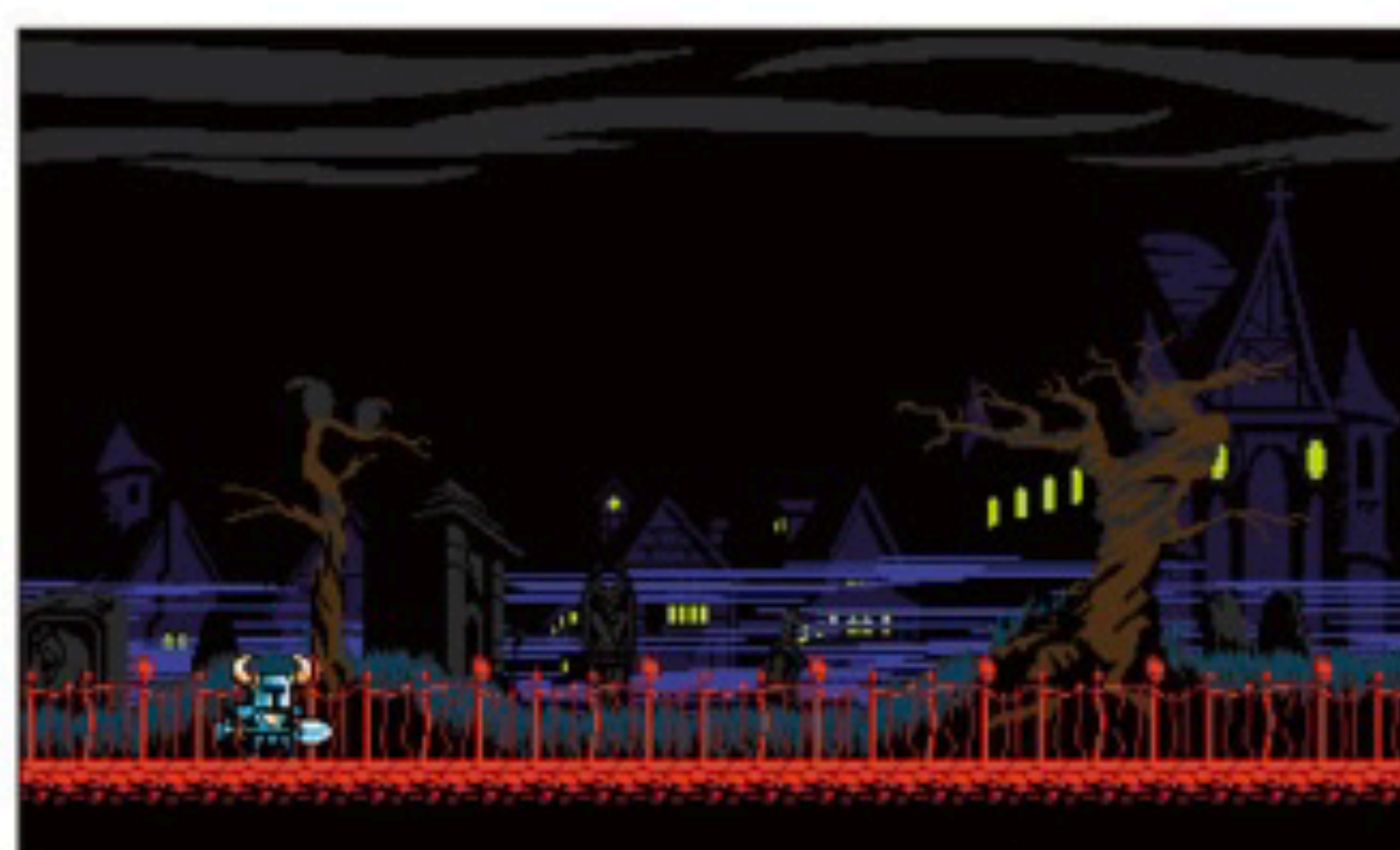
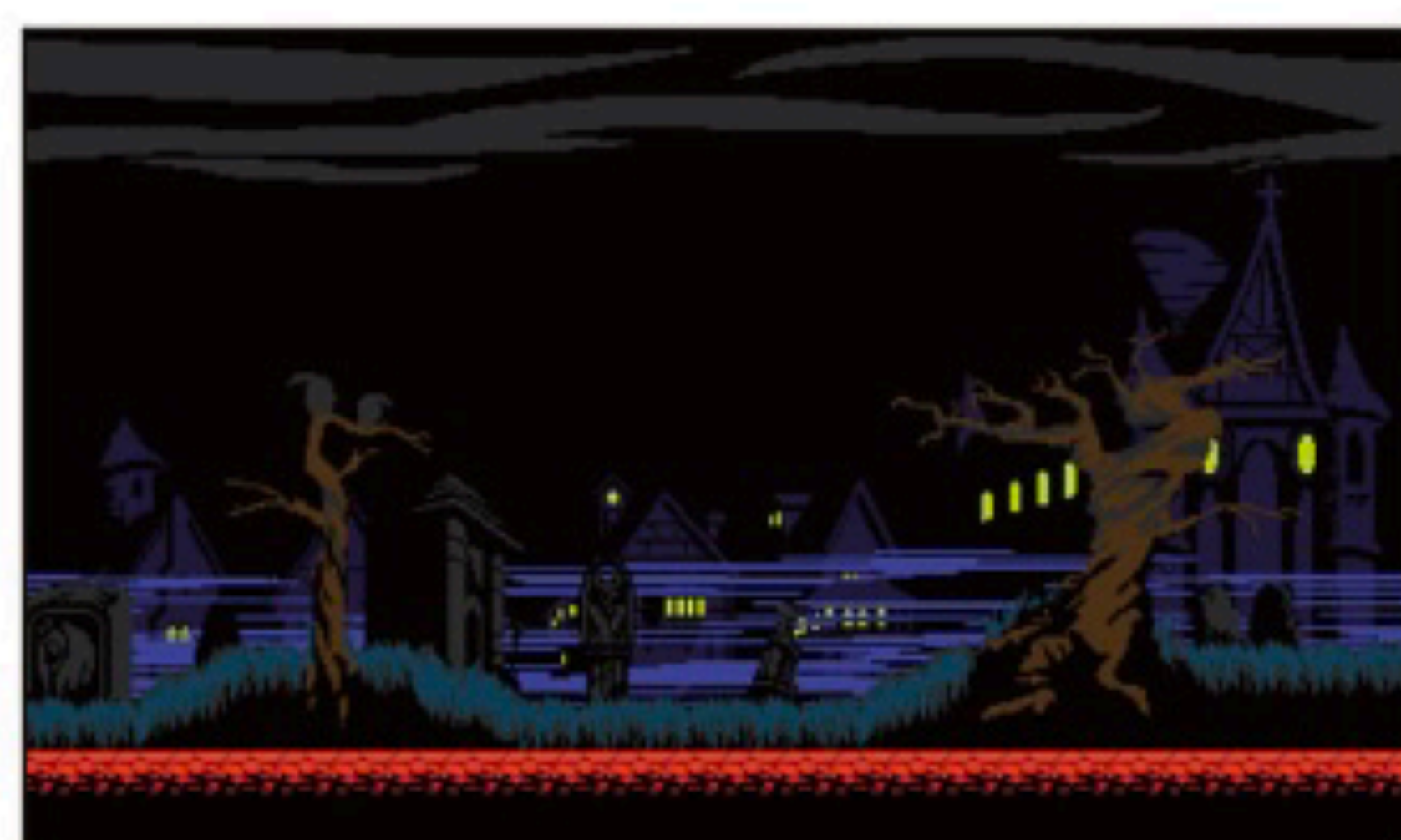
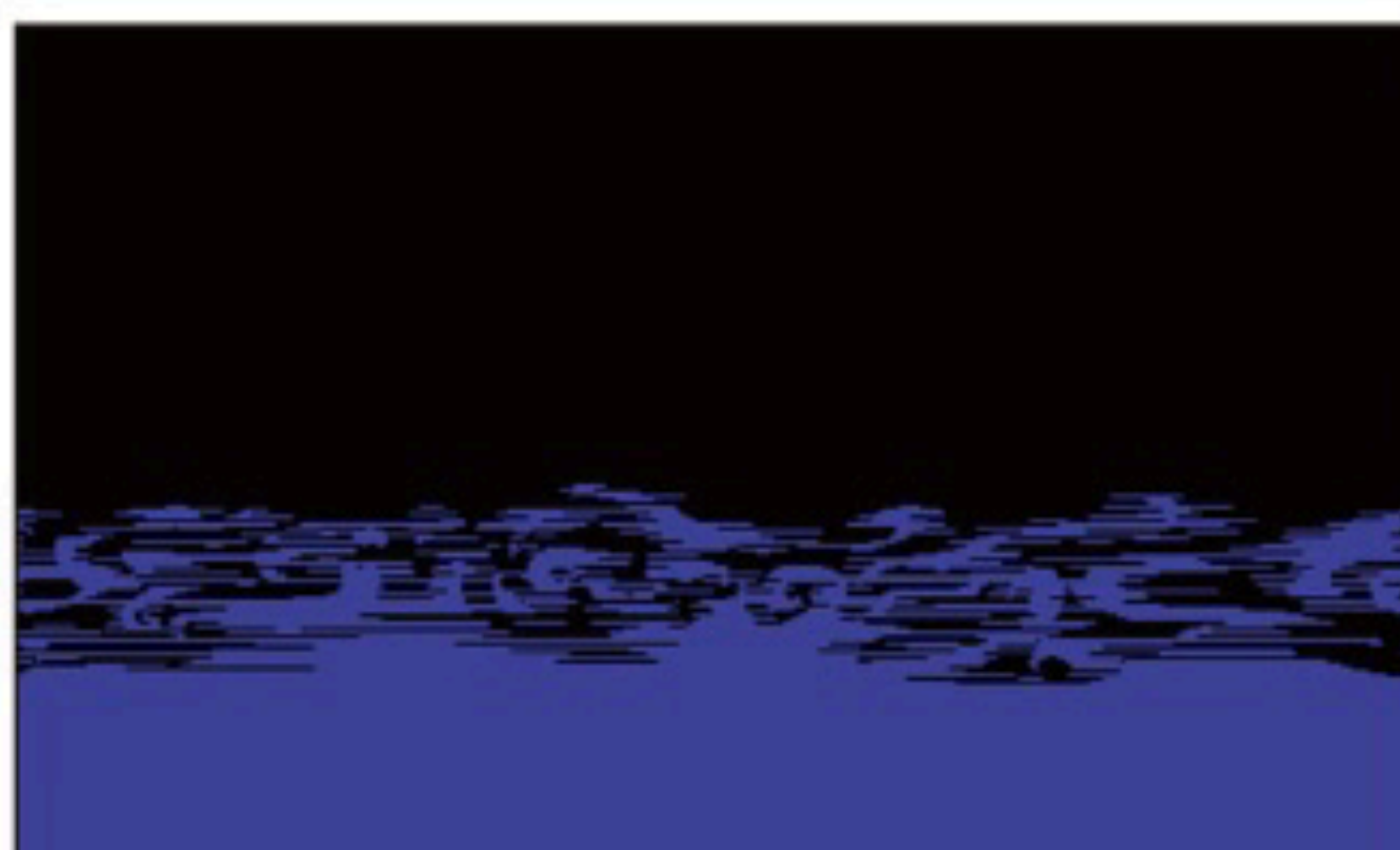
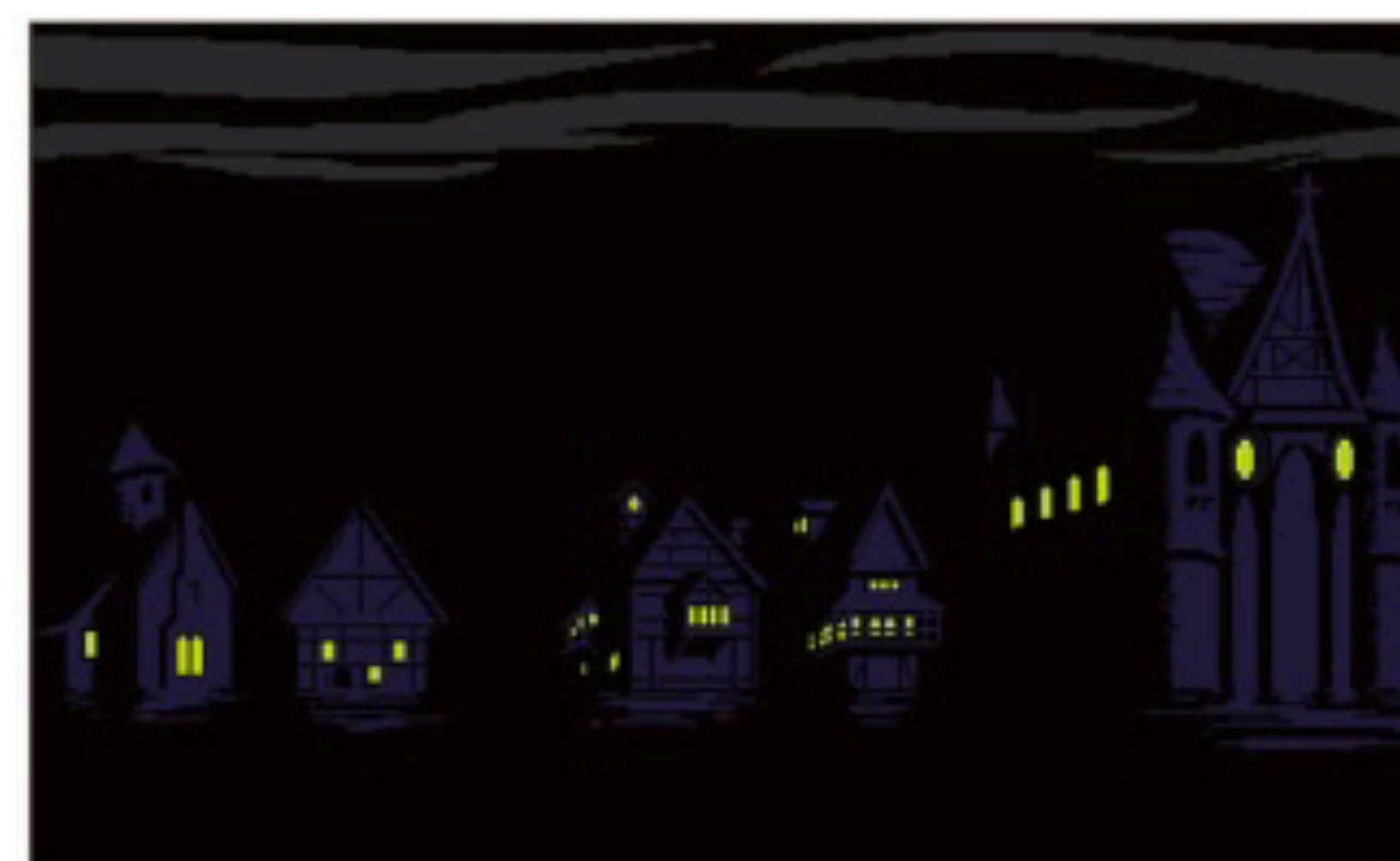
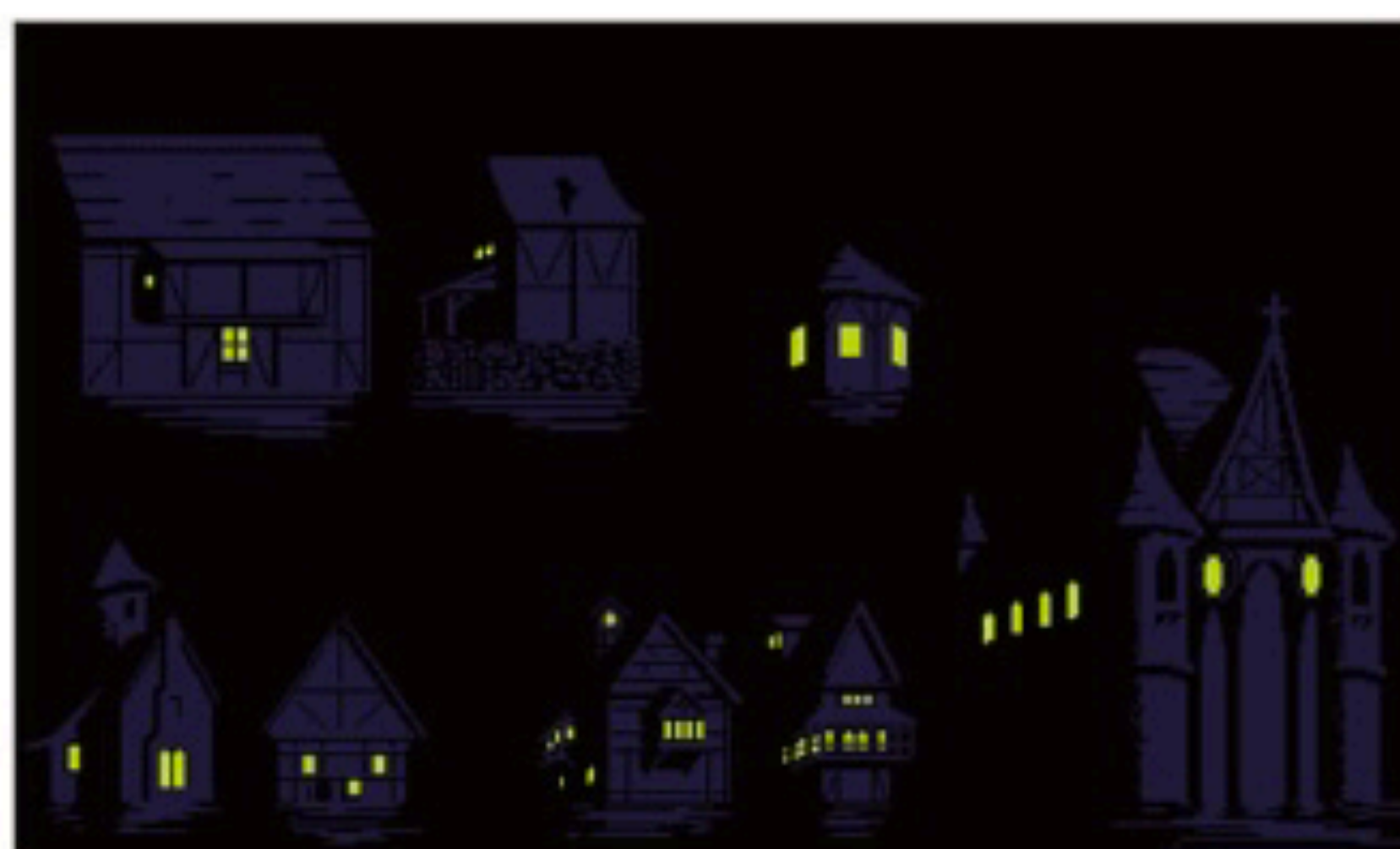
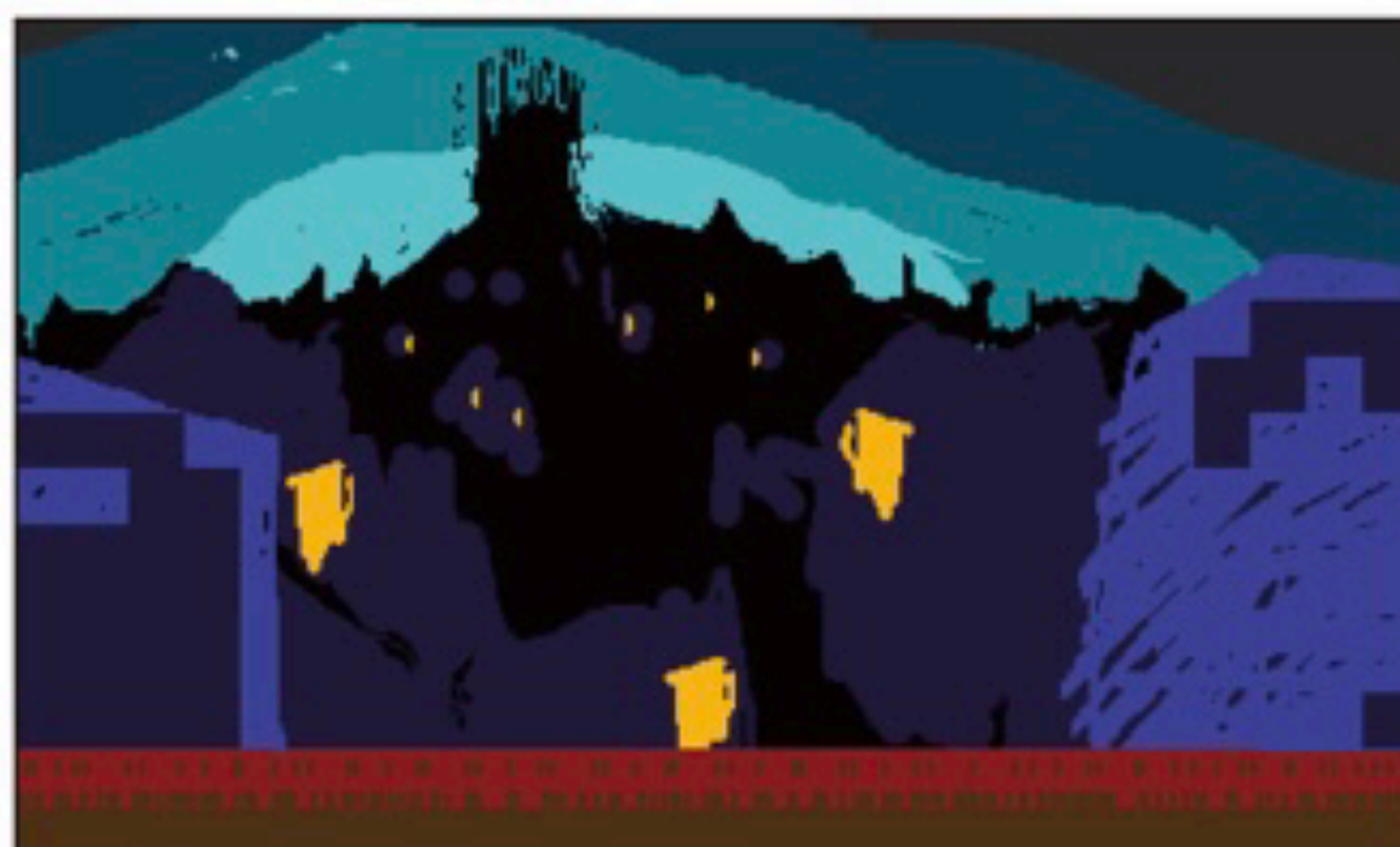


# TROUPPLE POND





# THE LICH YARD (SPECTER KNIGHT STAGE)

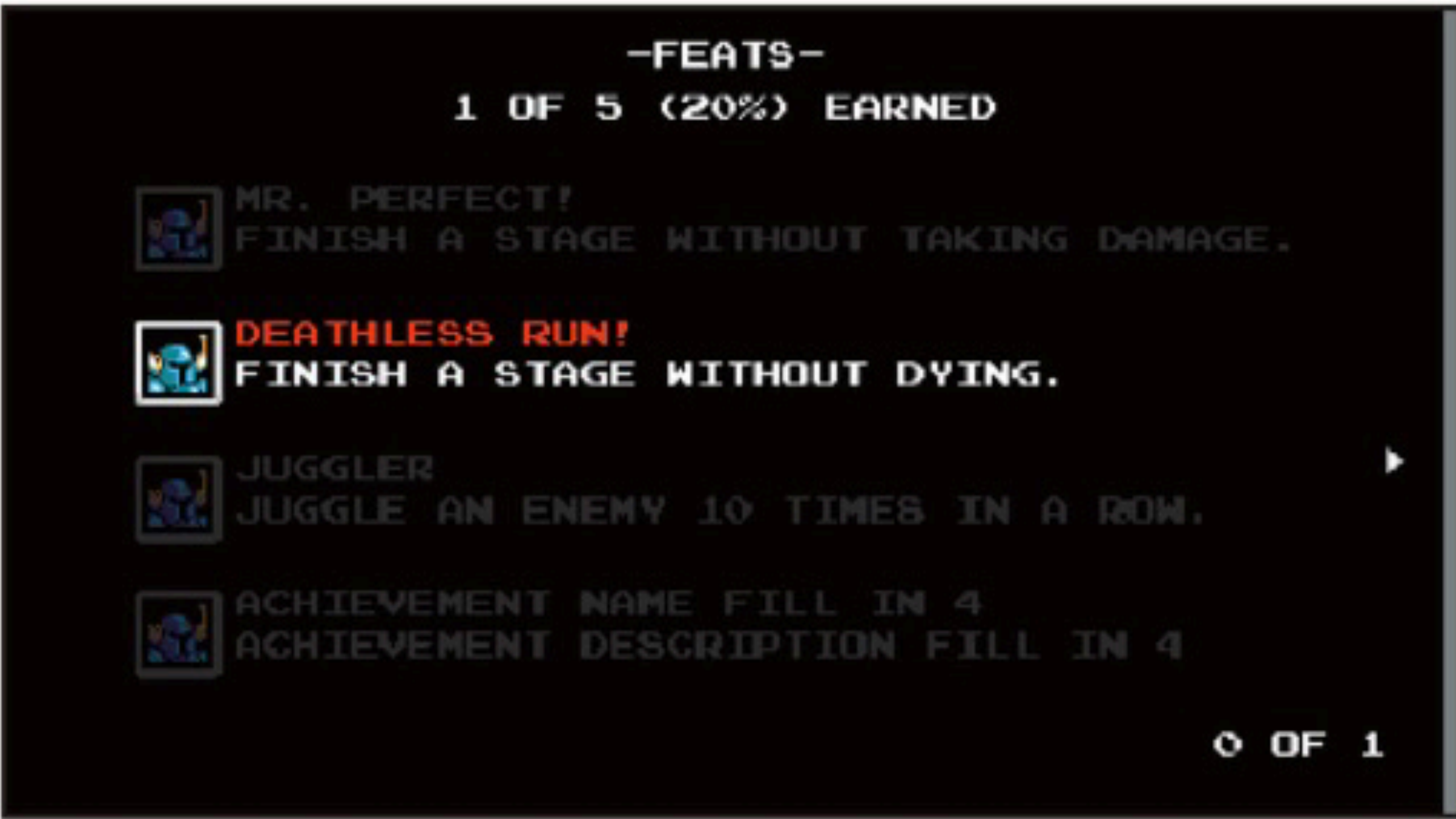
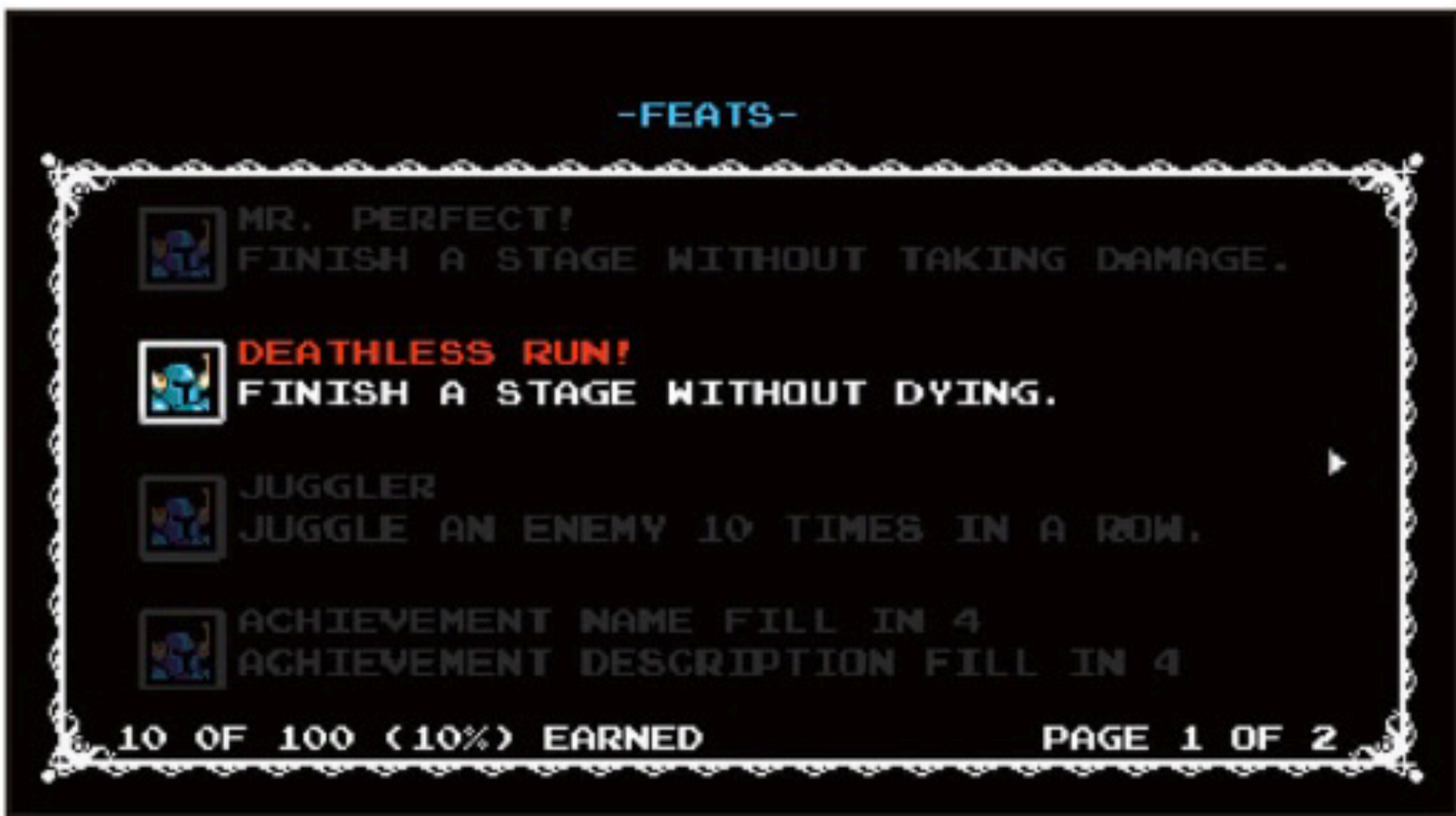


## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

In Specter Knight's stage, we used orange as a color language to describe everywhere you can stand or interact with the stage in some way. Even the gravestones have orange splotches on top of them!



# EARLY MENU SCREEN MOCKUPS



**DEVELOPER COMMENTARY**

Menus are really hard to make concise and understandable, so they were revised early and often. Notice the three stars next to the "Fire Rod" in the bottom-right screenshot... were those for different power levels?







## CHAPTER 5 EXTRAS

You didn't think we'd stop at production art, rough sketches, early concept illustrations, sprite sheets, stage backgrounds, and everything else in the preceding chapters, did you? Not a chance! Welcome to the Extras chapter, where you'll unearth all sorts of additional content like Kickstarter production materials, promotional imagery, art and sprites for guest characters making cameo appearances in the game, and production illustrations for *Shovel Knight's* first add-on campaign, *Plague of Shadows*!



# PROMOTIONAL IMAGERY

## GROUP SHOTS

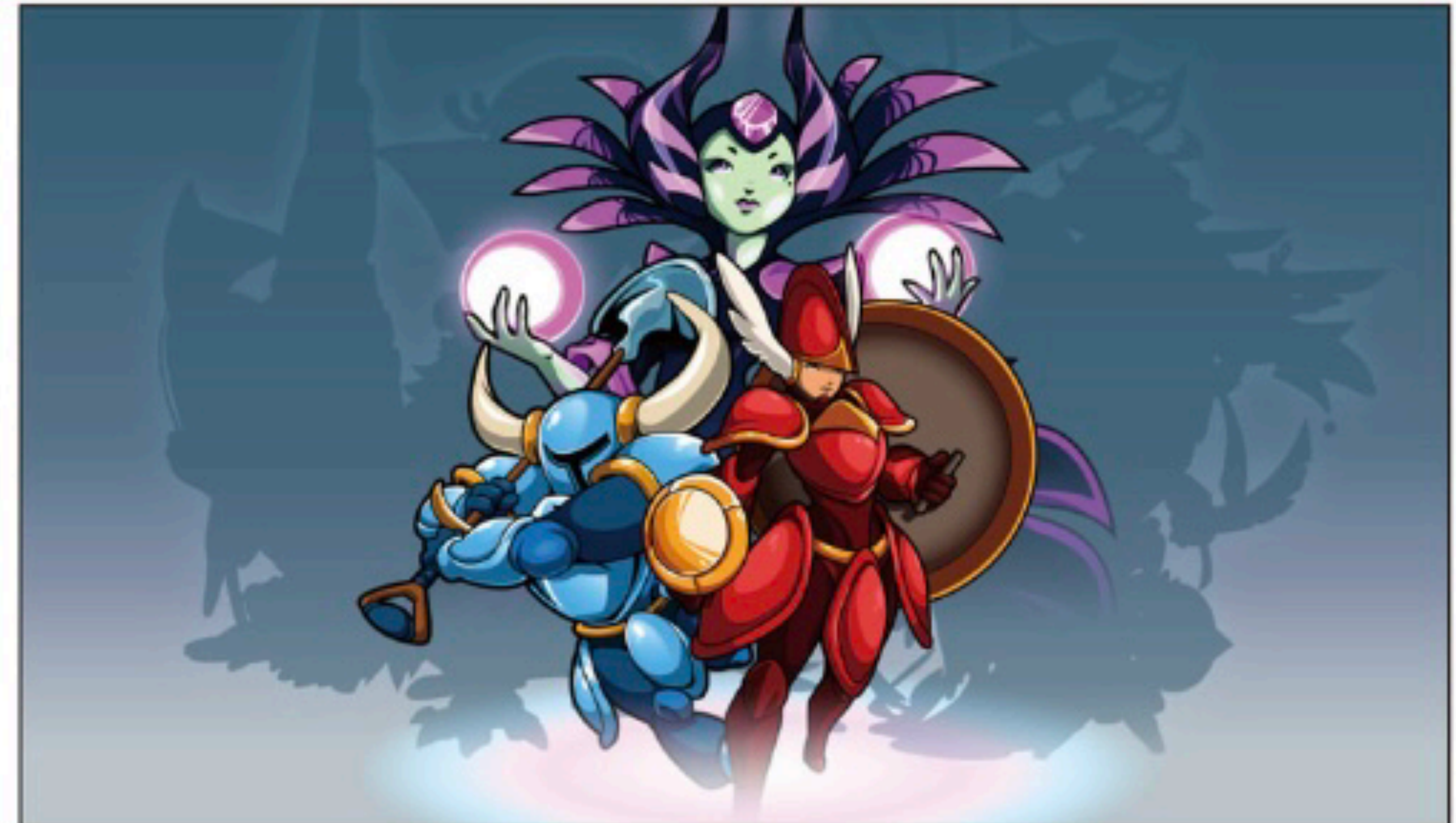


EXTRAS





## TRADING CARD BACKGROUNDS





## MISCELLANEOUS

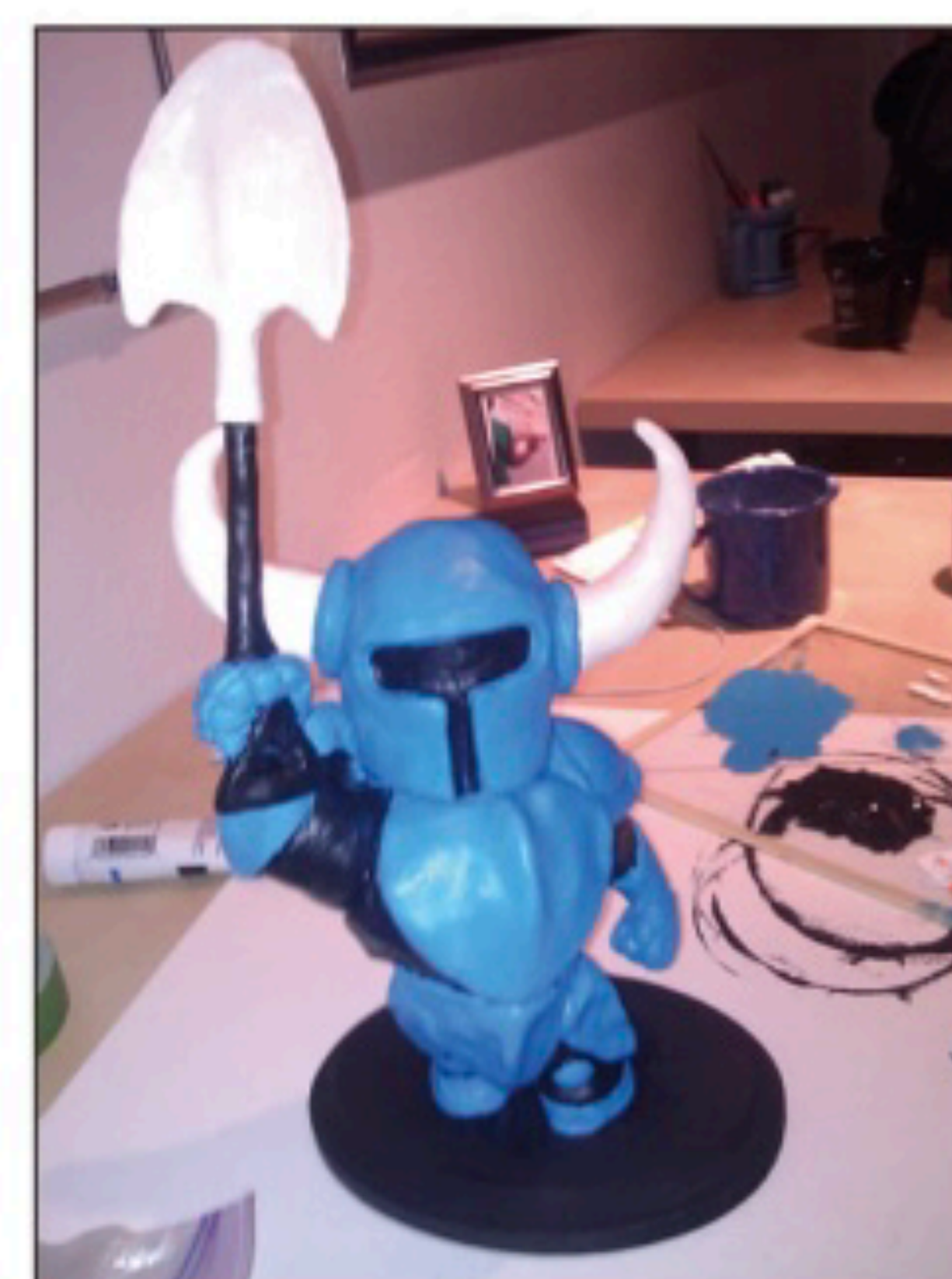
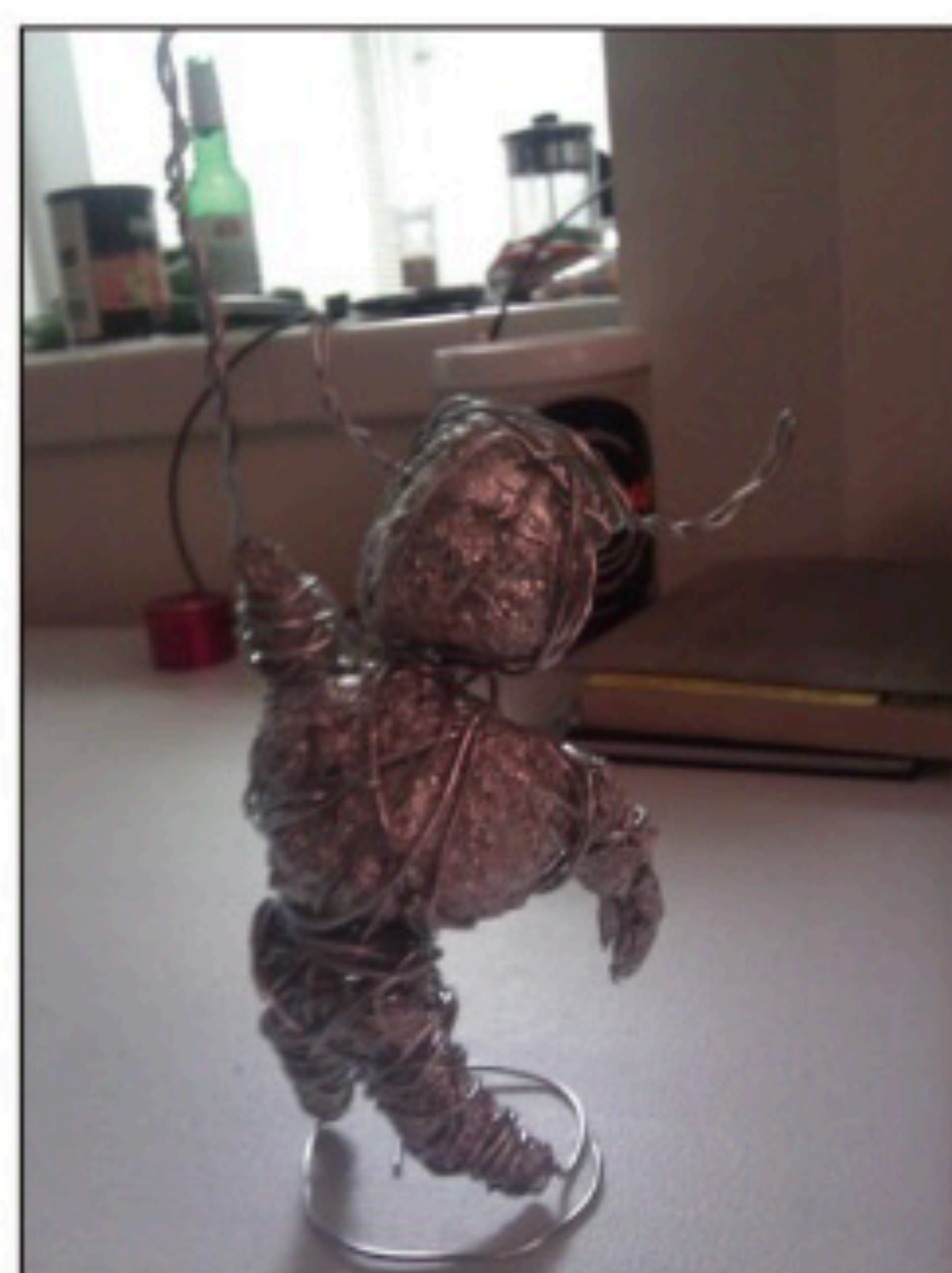


◆ **BUTTON DESIGNS**



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

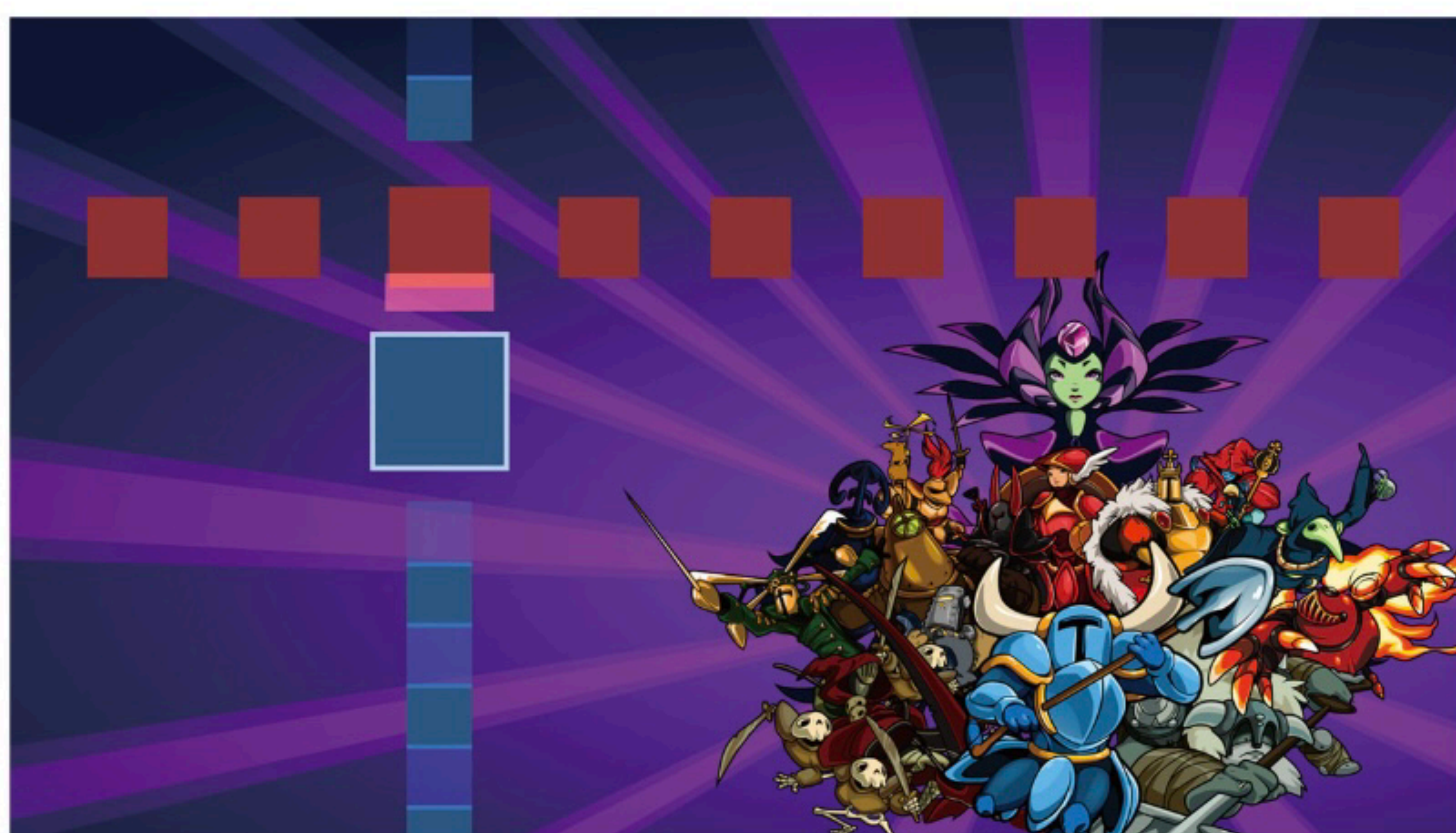
We try to make a new set of buttons for every convention we attend, where we hand them out for free on the show floor! This set was for PAX.



◆ **STATUE CREATION**

### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

This statue was sculpted before Shovel Knight's look was finalized. It was made as a family Christmas present in a year when only handmade gifts were allowed!



◆ **PLAYSTATION 3 THEME CONCEPT**

EXTRAS





## ◆ SOUNDTRACK COVER DESIGNS



## DEV. COMMENTARY

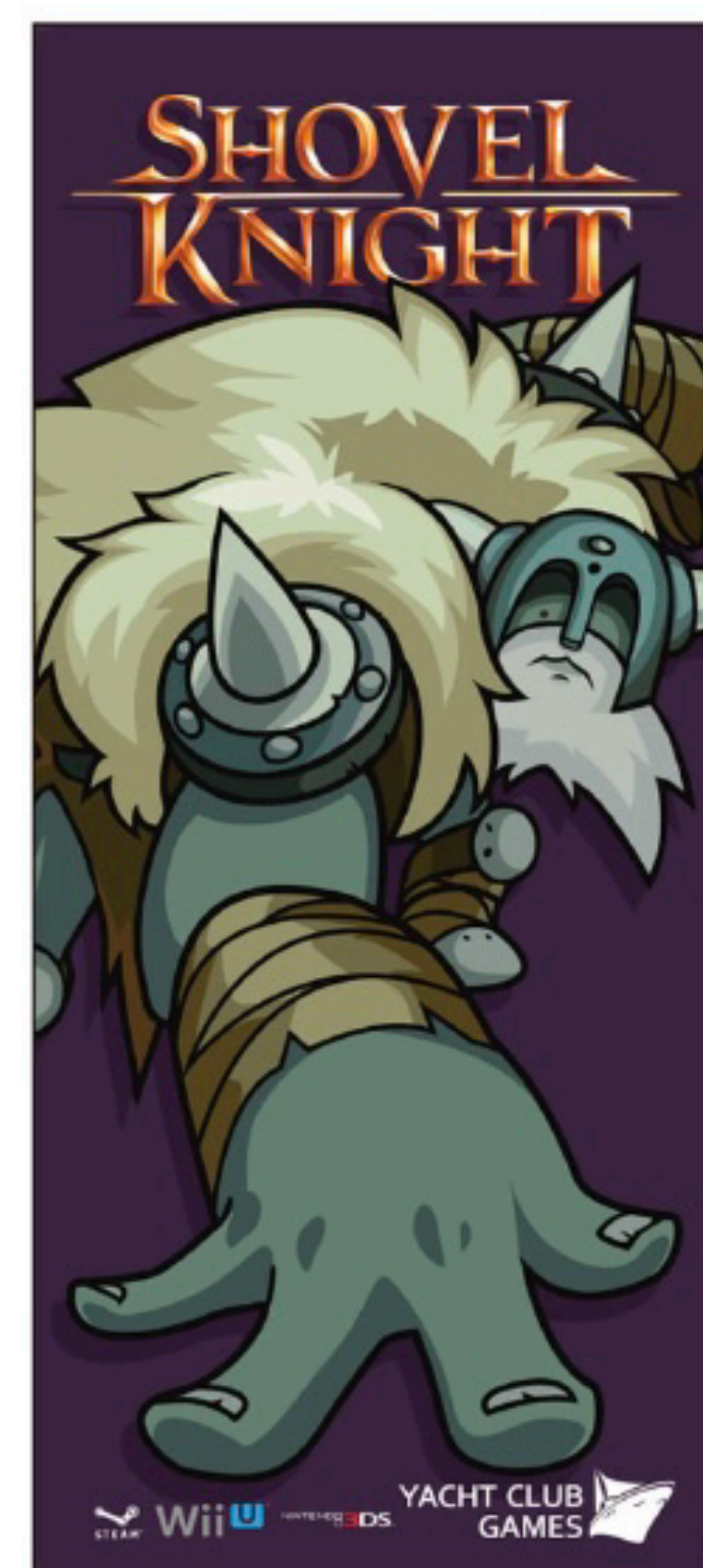
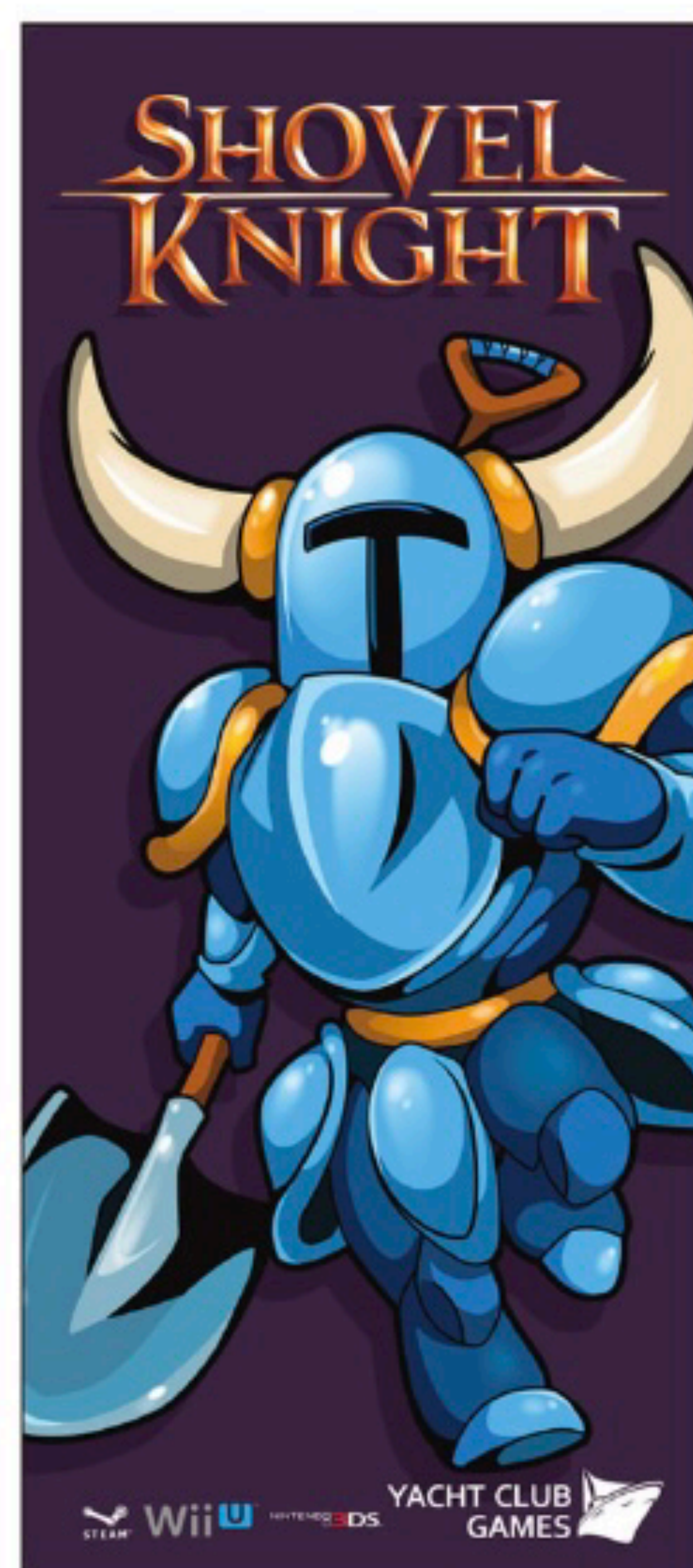
These are "spider" banners that we made for our very first little PAX booth. We wanted to emphasize our characters, but only Polar Knight was featured because his was the only art that was ready in time!



## ◆ CHRISTMAS IMAGE



## ◆ MILKMAID ILLUSTRATION



## ◆ BANNER DESIGNS



# KICKSTARTER

## KICKSTARTER CAMPAIGN GRAPHICS



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Developing a Kickstarter game means you have to plan way into the future. We aren't very good at that, but we did our best to stick to our promises!



EXTRAS

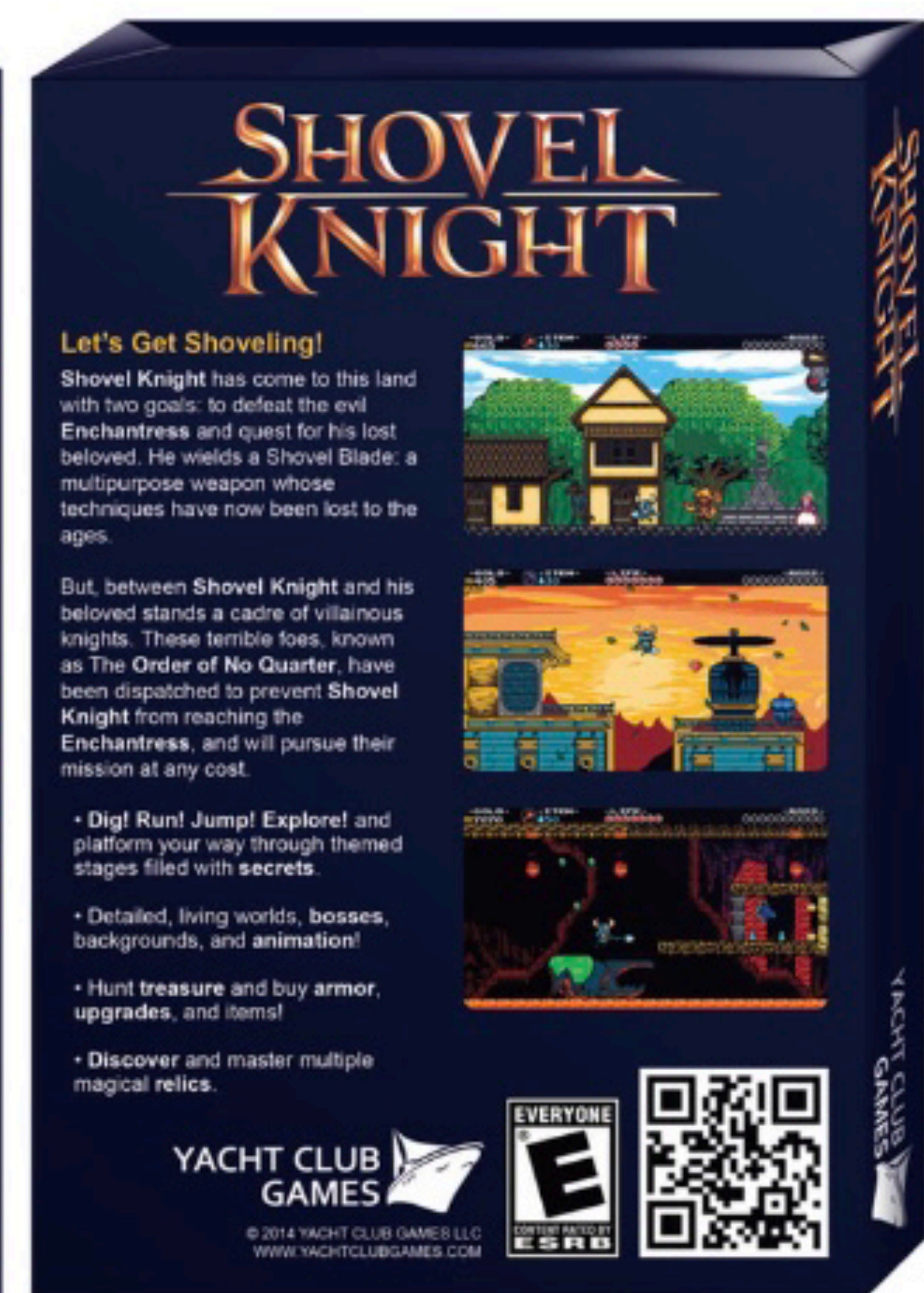




# KICKSTARTER REWARD CONCEPTS



GAME BOX CONCEPT



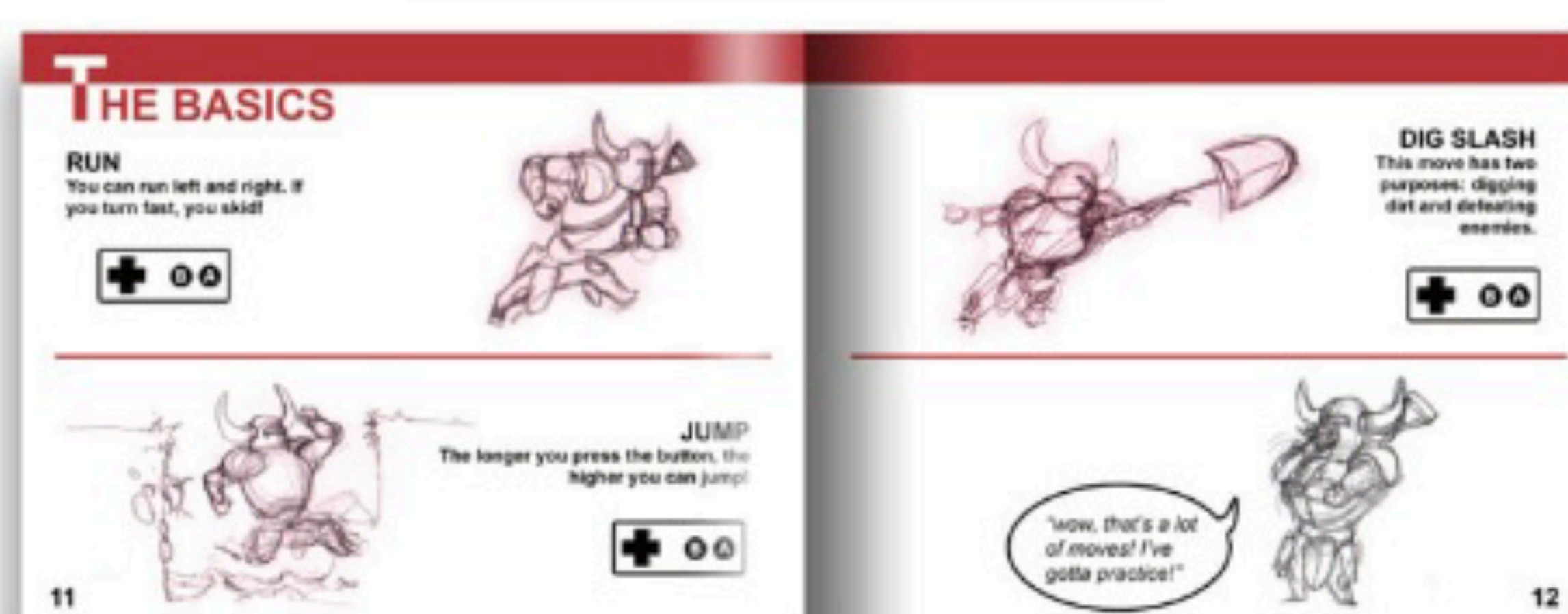
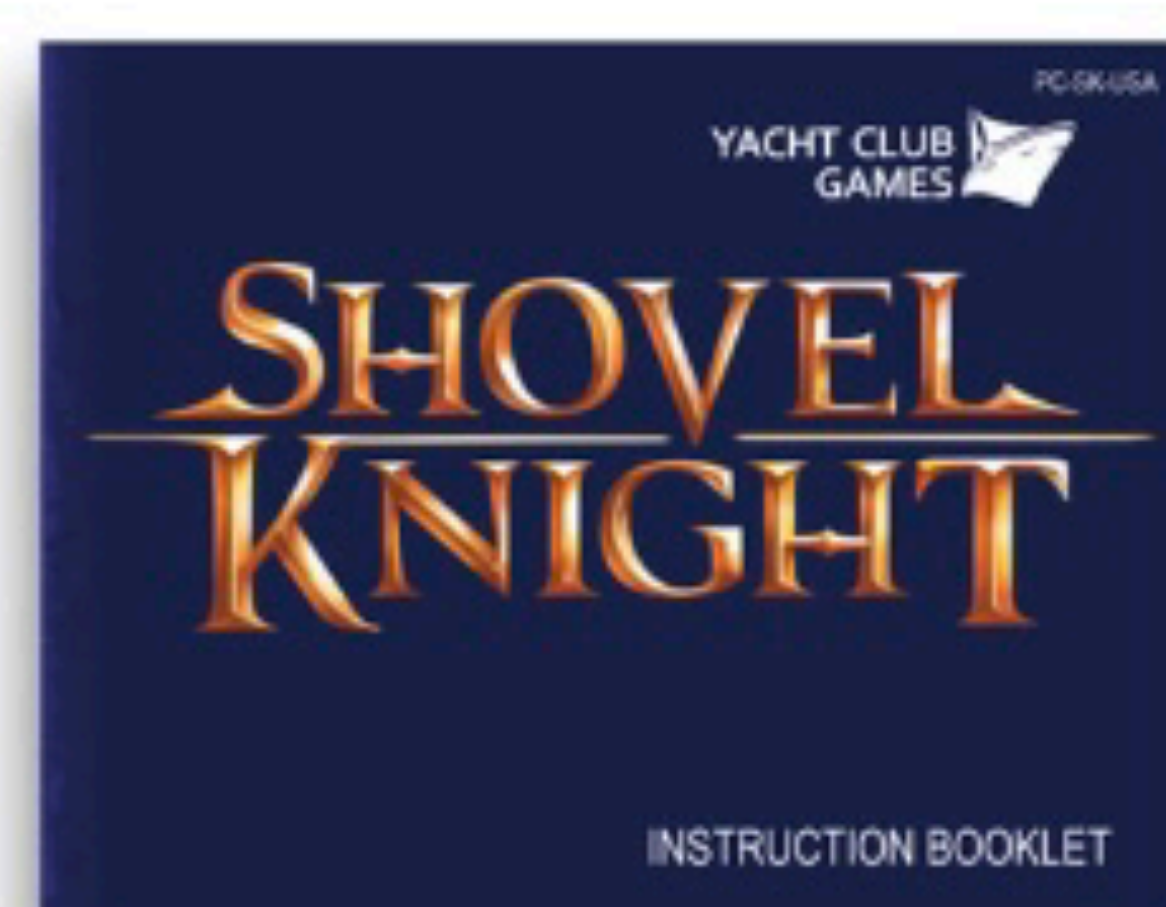
GAME BOX



COFFEE TABLE BOOK



SOUND TRACK



GAME MANUAL

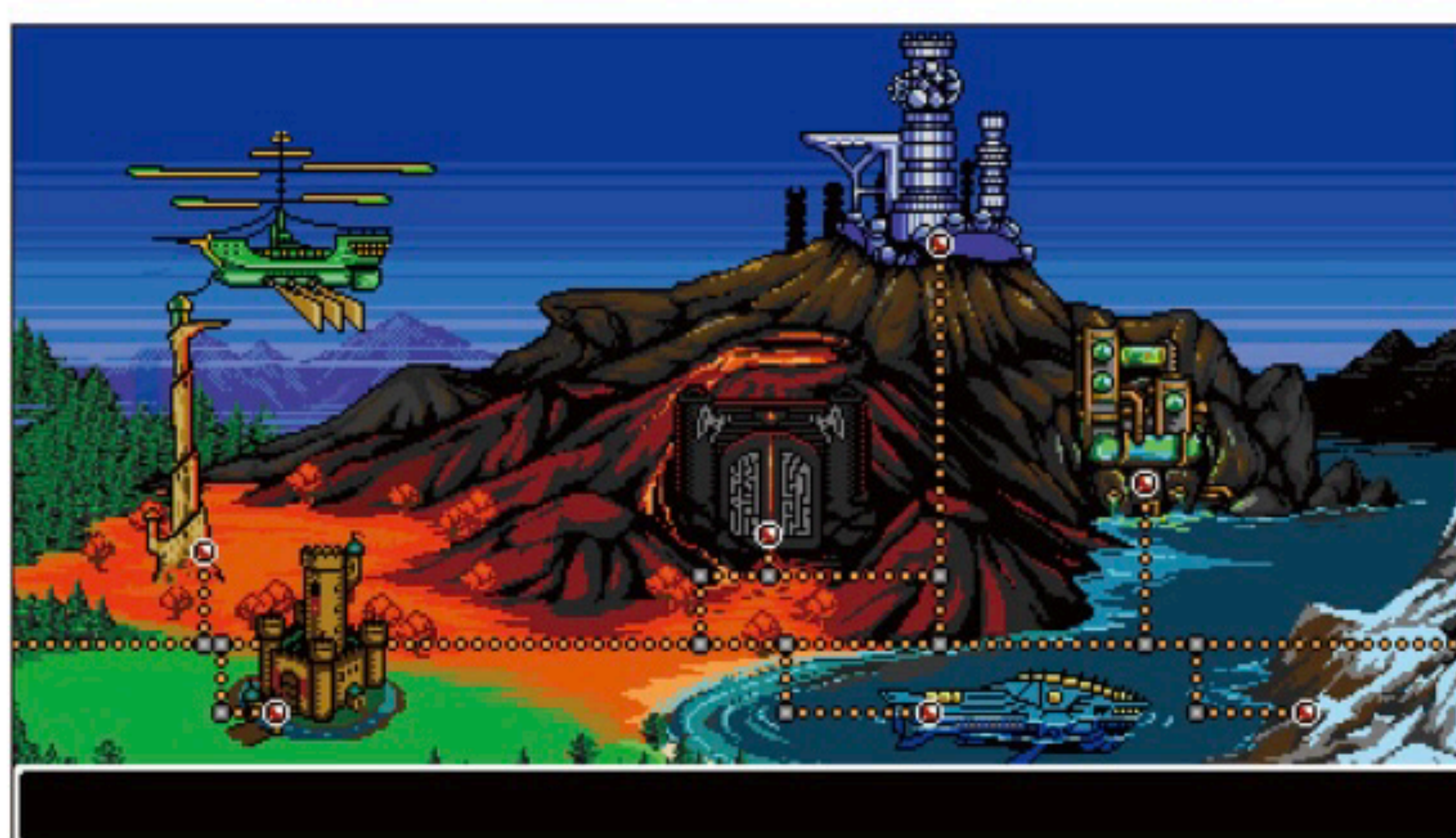


## KICKSTARTER GAME DEVELOPMENT PREVIEWS



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We offered a Kickstarter reward tier that would have been a big sleepover with the Yacht Club Games crew. No one contributed at that reward level, though. We never had the party...



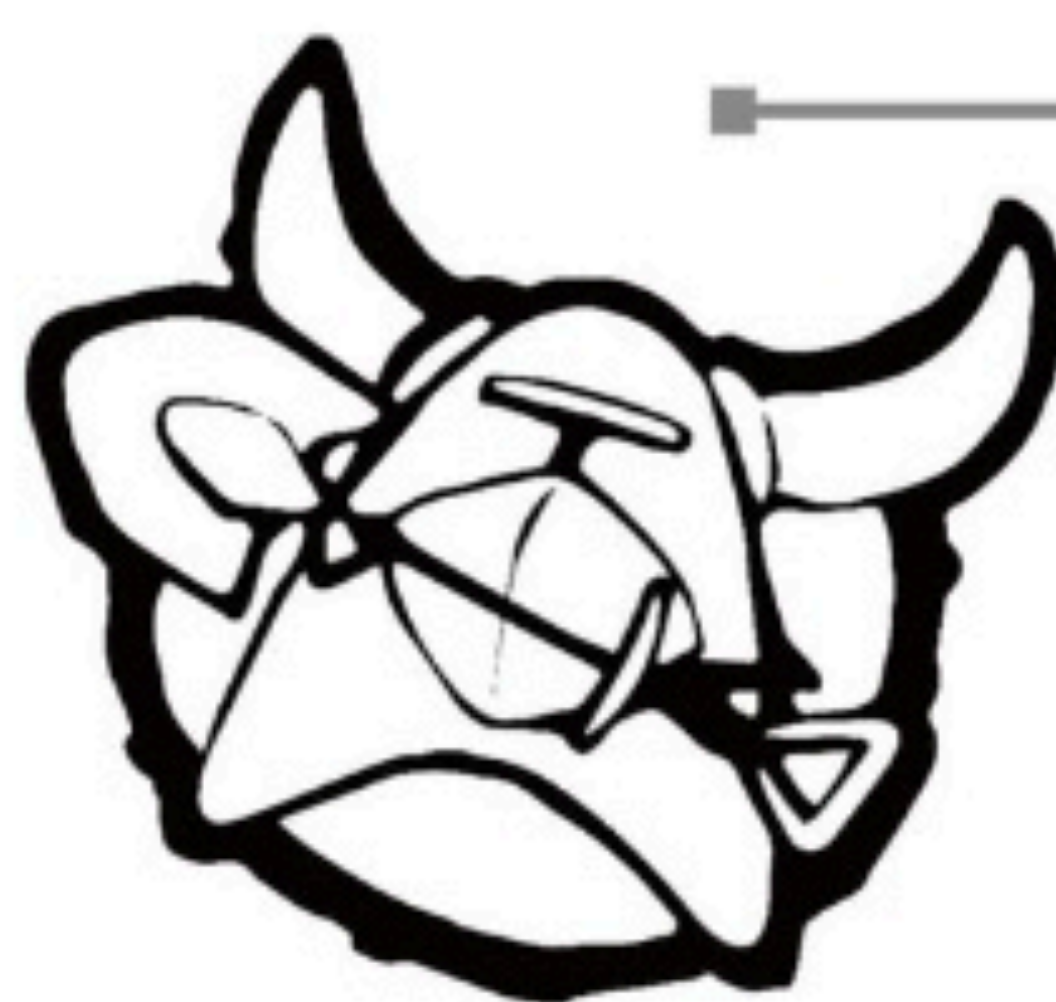
EXTRAS





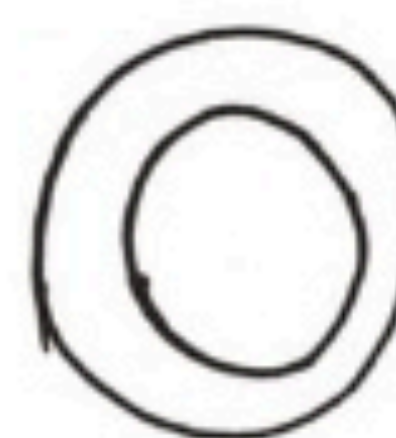


◆ SIGNED DIRT



#### DEV. COMMENTARY

This stamp was designed to be emblazoned upon our "letter full of dirt" Kickstarter reward.



#### DEV. COMMENTARY

We created eight types of "dirt" to match the lair of each knight in *The Order of No Quarter*, which we put into envelopes and sent to Kickstarter backers. We literally sold dirt!



# SHOVEL KNIGHT



# SHOVEL KNIGHT: PLAGUE OF SHADOWS



◆ PLAGUE KNIGHT KEY ART



◆ BOMB ART -POWDERS-



◆ BOMB ART -CASINGS-



◆ BOMB ART -FUSES-

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

As a team, we'd never created an update to an existing game. It was quite the challenge to redesign existing elements around a whole new character for Plague of Shadows.







◆ SCIENCE CANNON



◆ VAT



◆ ESSENCE GET



◆ SPIN BURST

#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

A new main character meant a new set of anchor images, so we did these illustrations highlighting Plague Knight's mobility and arsenal.

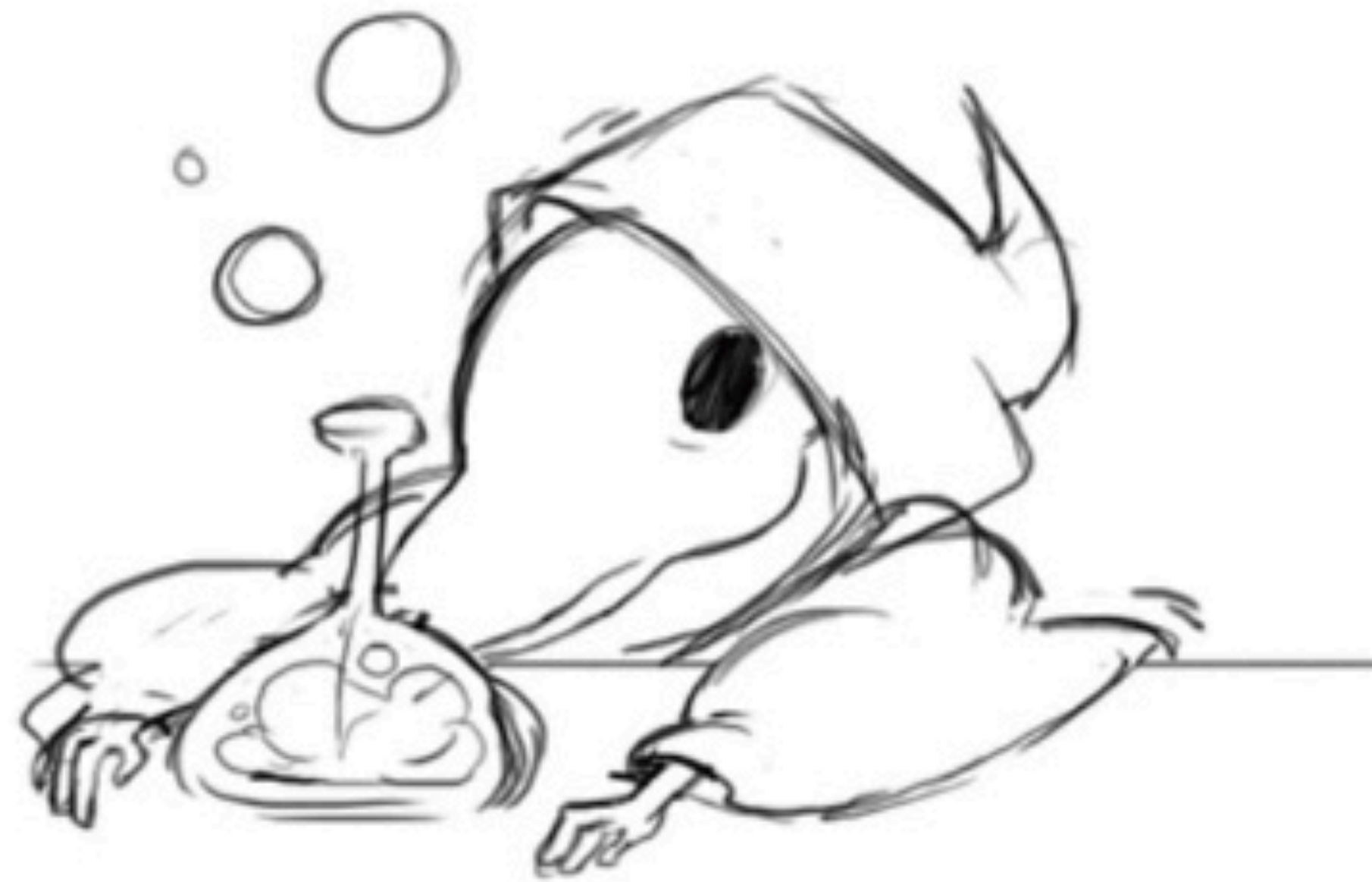


# PLAGUE OF SHADOWS (CONTINUED)

## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Revisiting Shovel Knight for Plague of Shadows meant that we had to concept everything out again!

## DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



EXTRAS

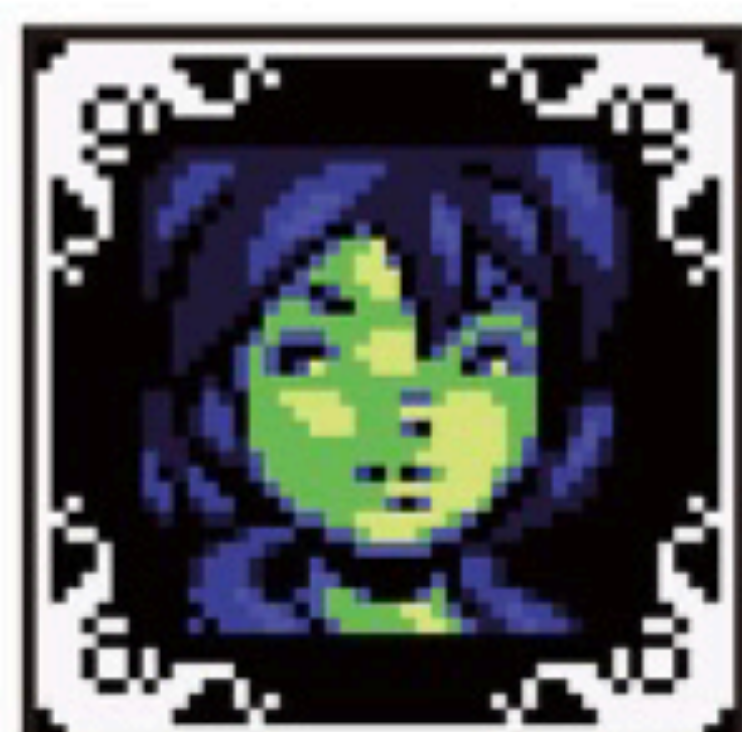






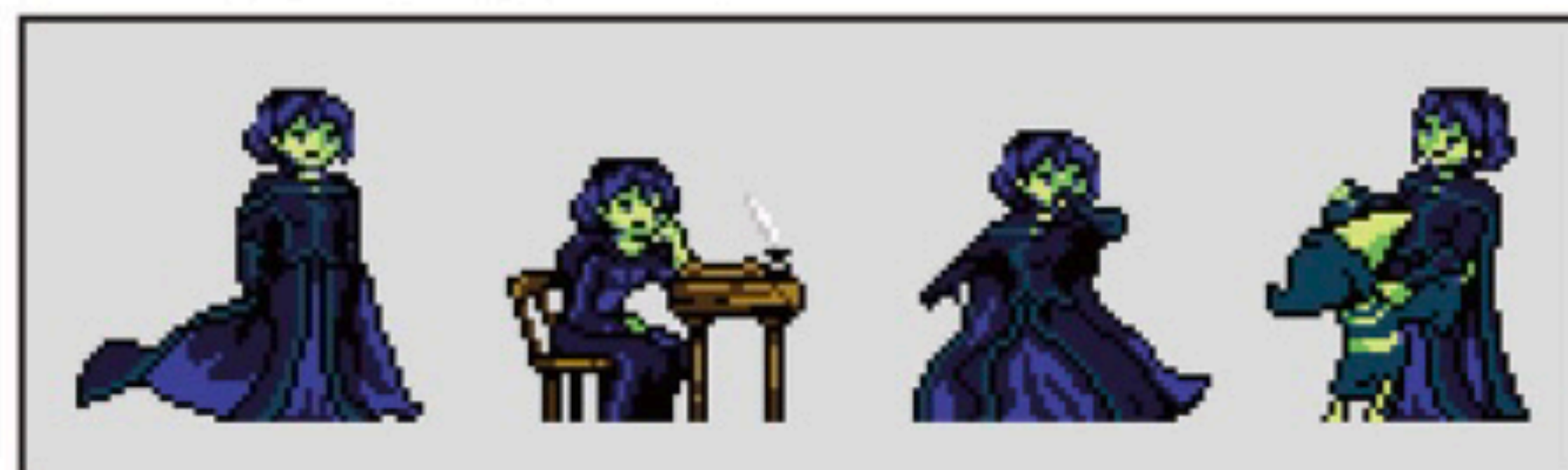


# PLAGUE OF SHADOWS (CONTINUED)



## MONA

### GAME SPRITES



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

We had to redesign Mona to take her from "minor NPC" to "main character." This involved embellishing both her personality and her costume!

### EARLY CONCEPT



### KEY ART



### DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



EXTRAS



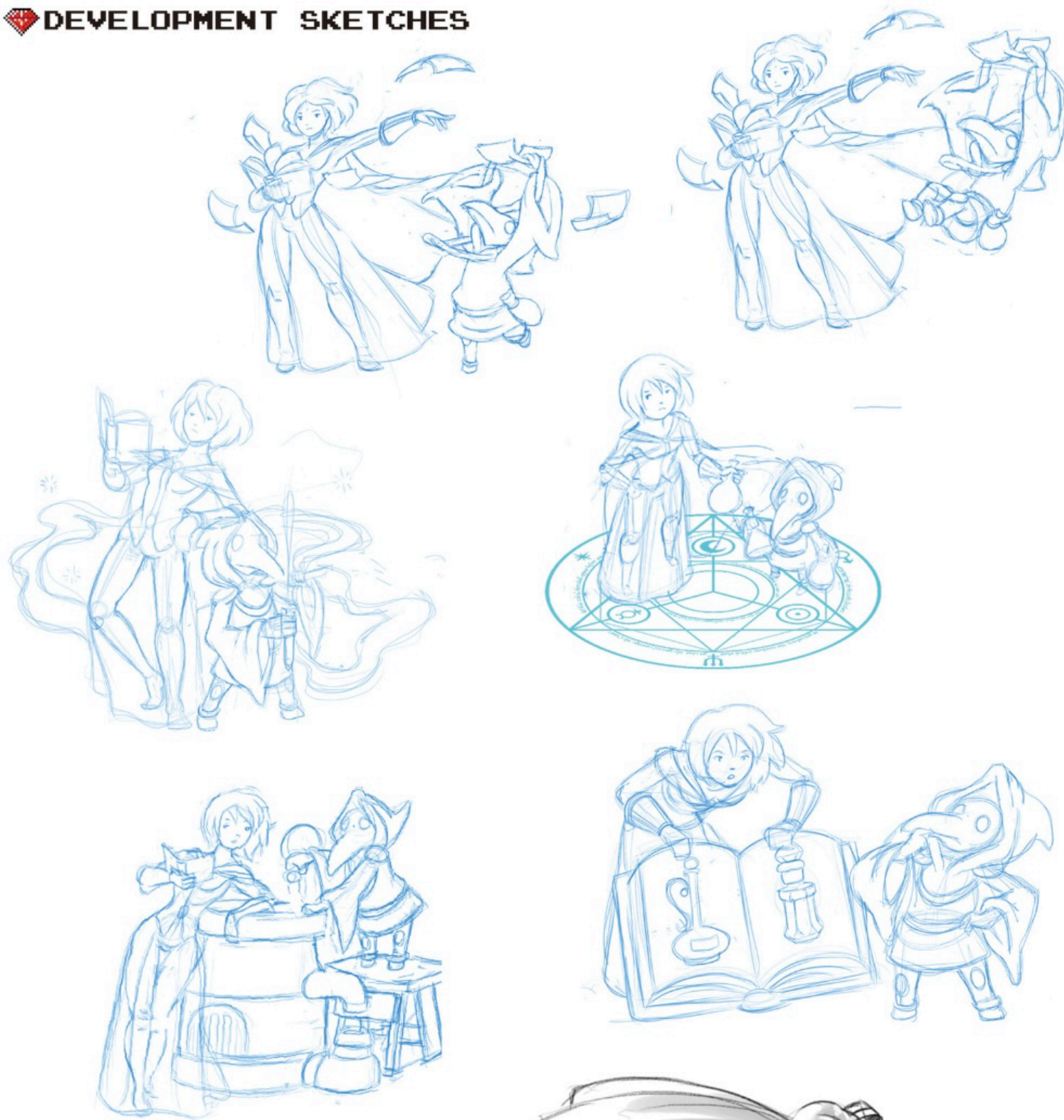






## PLAGUE OF SHADOWS (CONTINUED)

### ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES

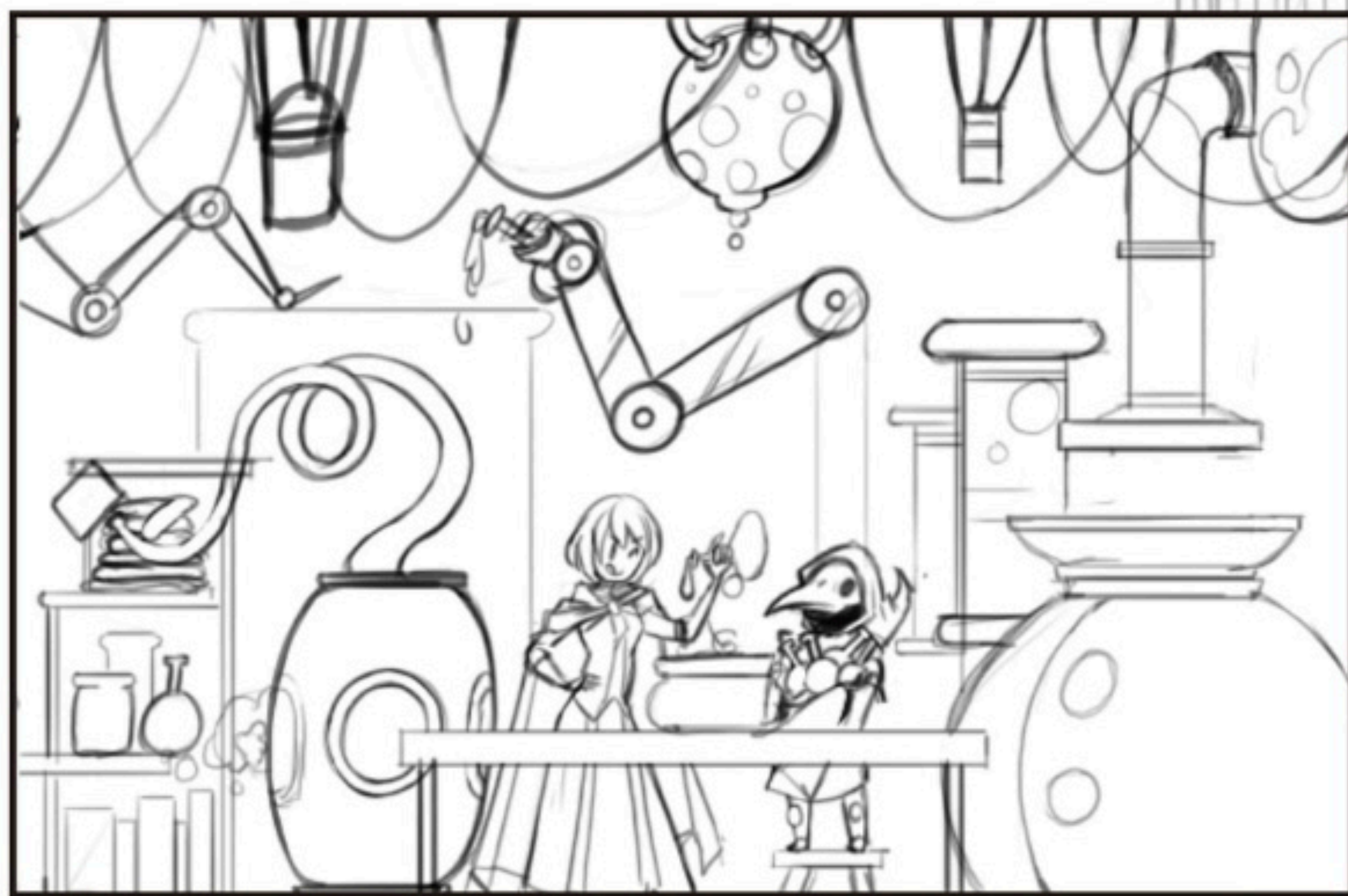


#### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

These images established how Plague Knight and Mona might interact while doing alchemy. Some of these drafts were used to figure out the title image for the game.



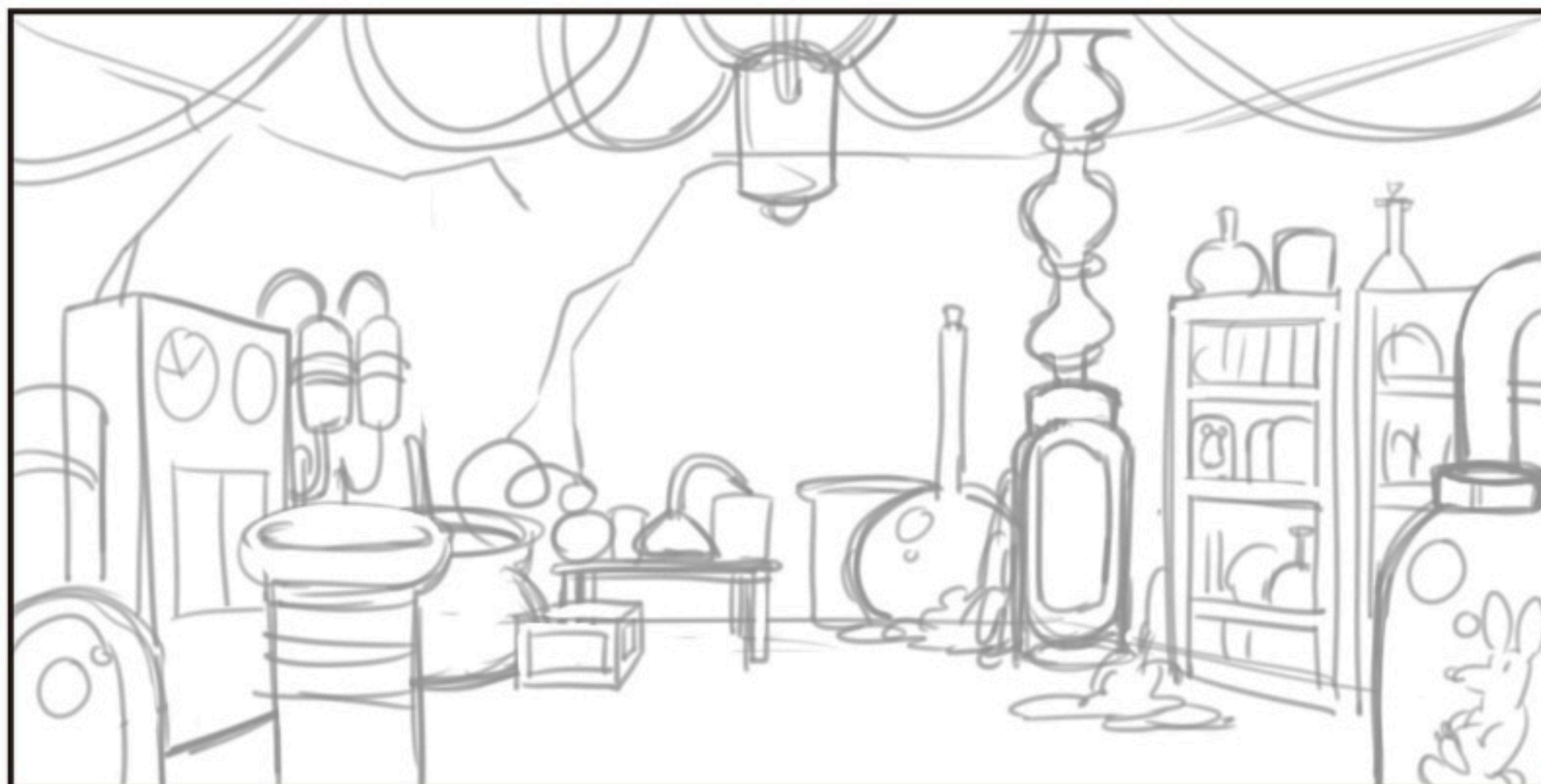






## PLAGUE OF SHADOWS (CONTINUED)

### ENVIRONMENTS AND OBJECTS



#### DEV. COMMENTARY

Elements of all of these concepts were pulled together to create the final Potionarium.





## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

Our initial design called for checkpoints to be replaced with a mobile alchemy lab where you could mix potions and upgrade Plague Knight. These little windows were created to show Plague Knight working in a compact space.



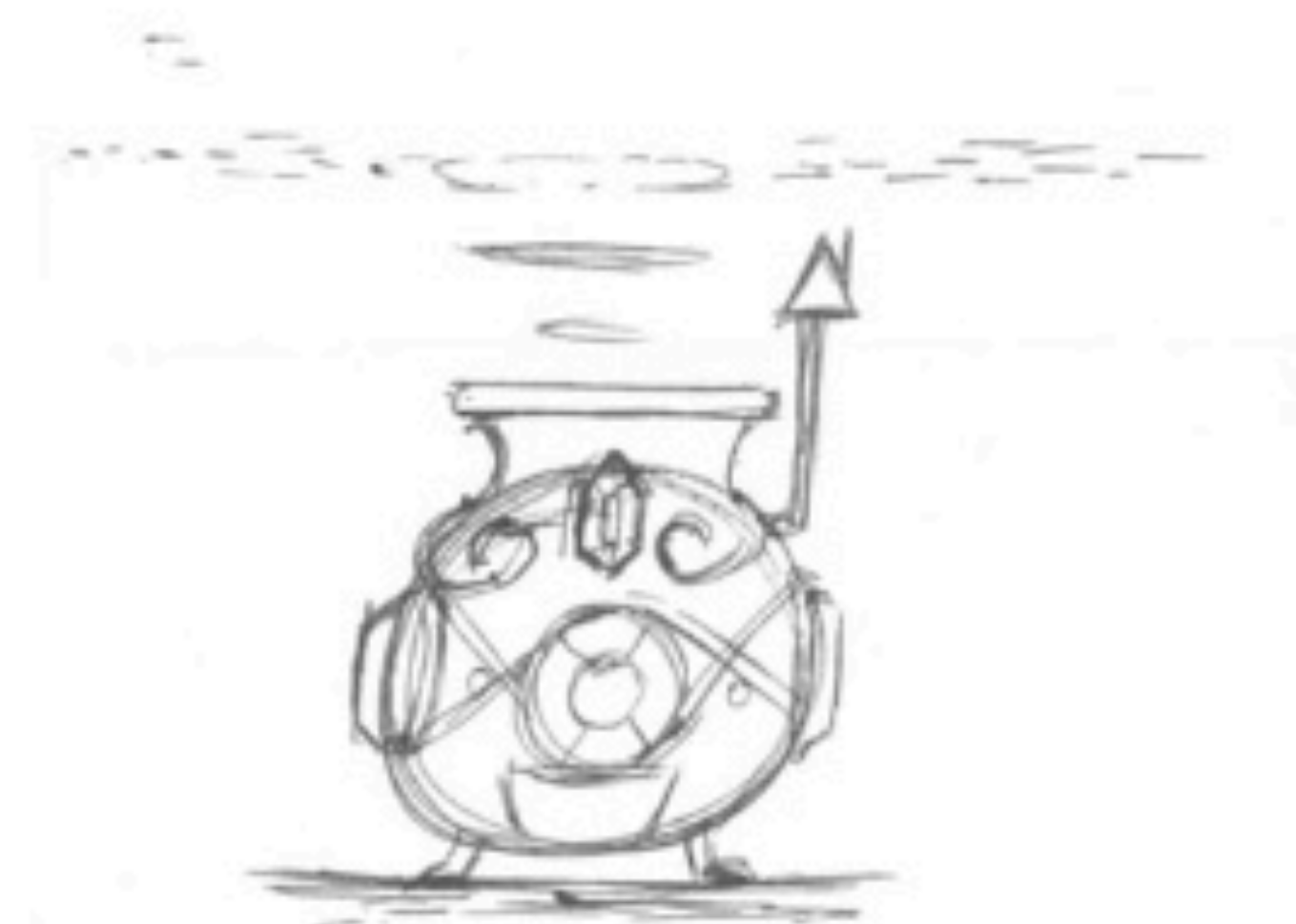
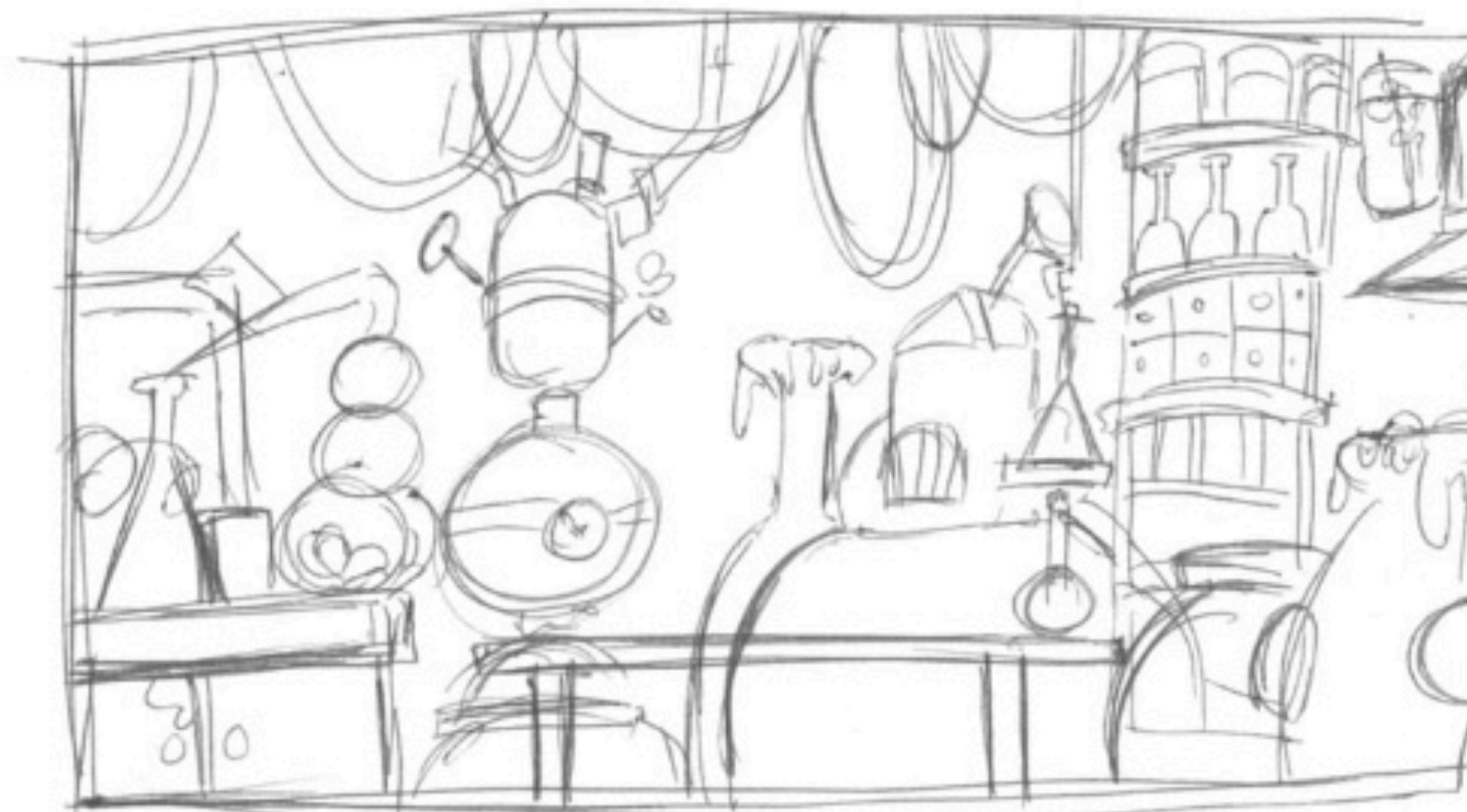
#5 plague



#3 plague



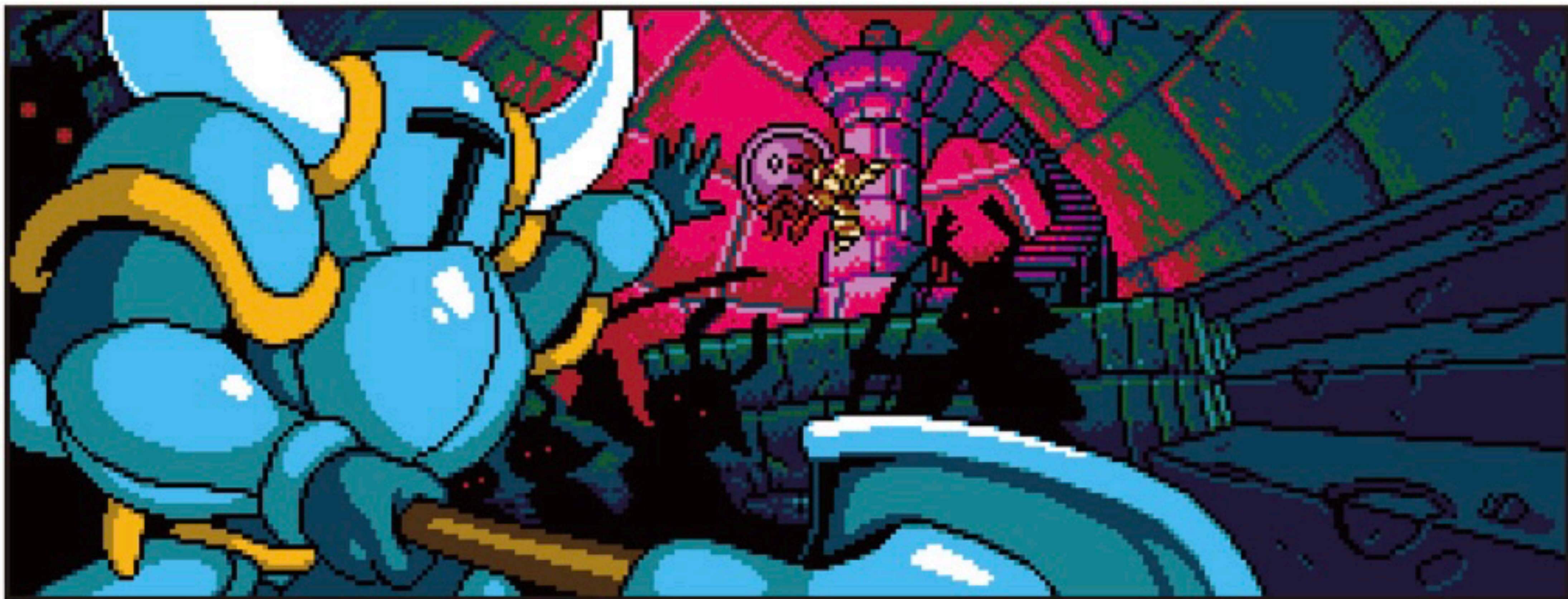
you



maybe our fire?

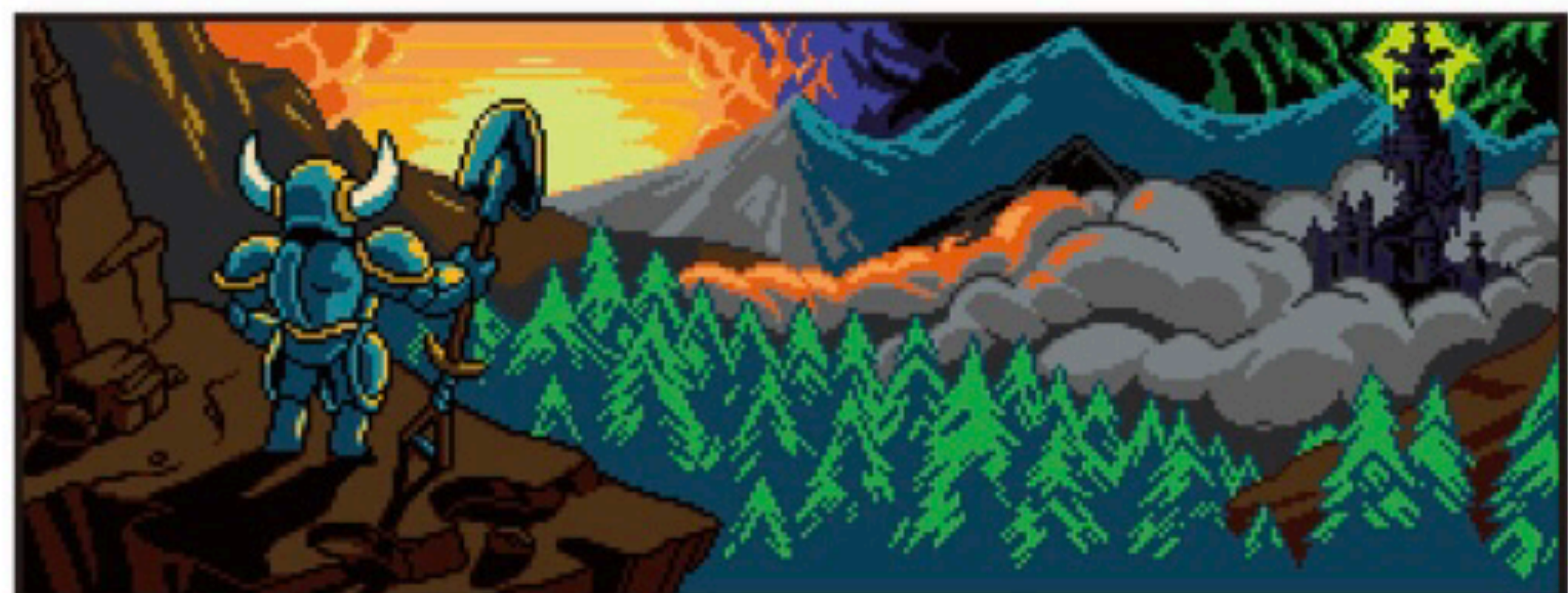


# CUTSCENES



## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap's storybook-style intro was the inspiration for our palette shifted fade-ins. We took it one step further in Shovel Knight, fading in certain parts of the image first, therefore emphasizing specific areas or even creating the illusion of motion or a sunset!





# DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



This is a legend of adventure, knights and magic!  
But not every knight wields a sword. This story is about  
a knight who fights with a shovel,  
and another knight who carries two shields.



He was called Shovel Knight, and she was named Shield Knight.  
For years, they were inseparable treasure hunters in a peaceful land.



On their final adventure, Shield Knight and Shovel Knight  
ascended a Dark Tower filled fraught with danger and enemies.  
They underestimated their foes, and Shield Knight fell.



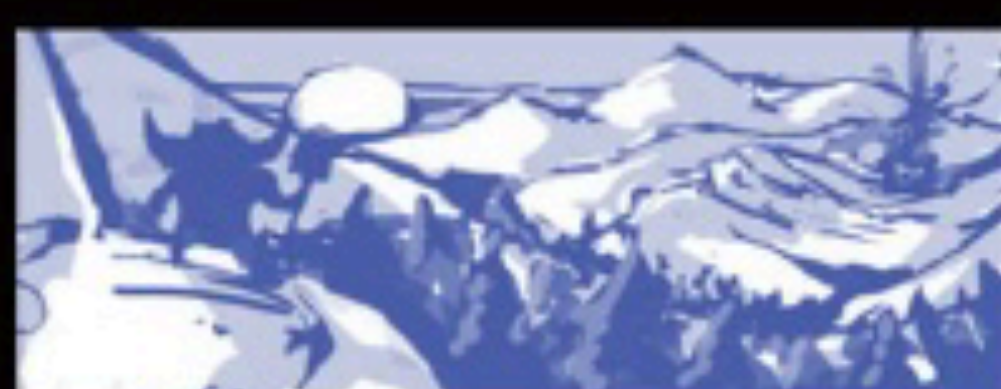
Shovel Knight tried to catch Shield Knight, but lost her in the chaos of  
the battle. When he awoke in town, the tower was empty,  
and Shield Knight was gone.



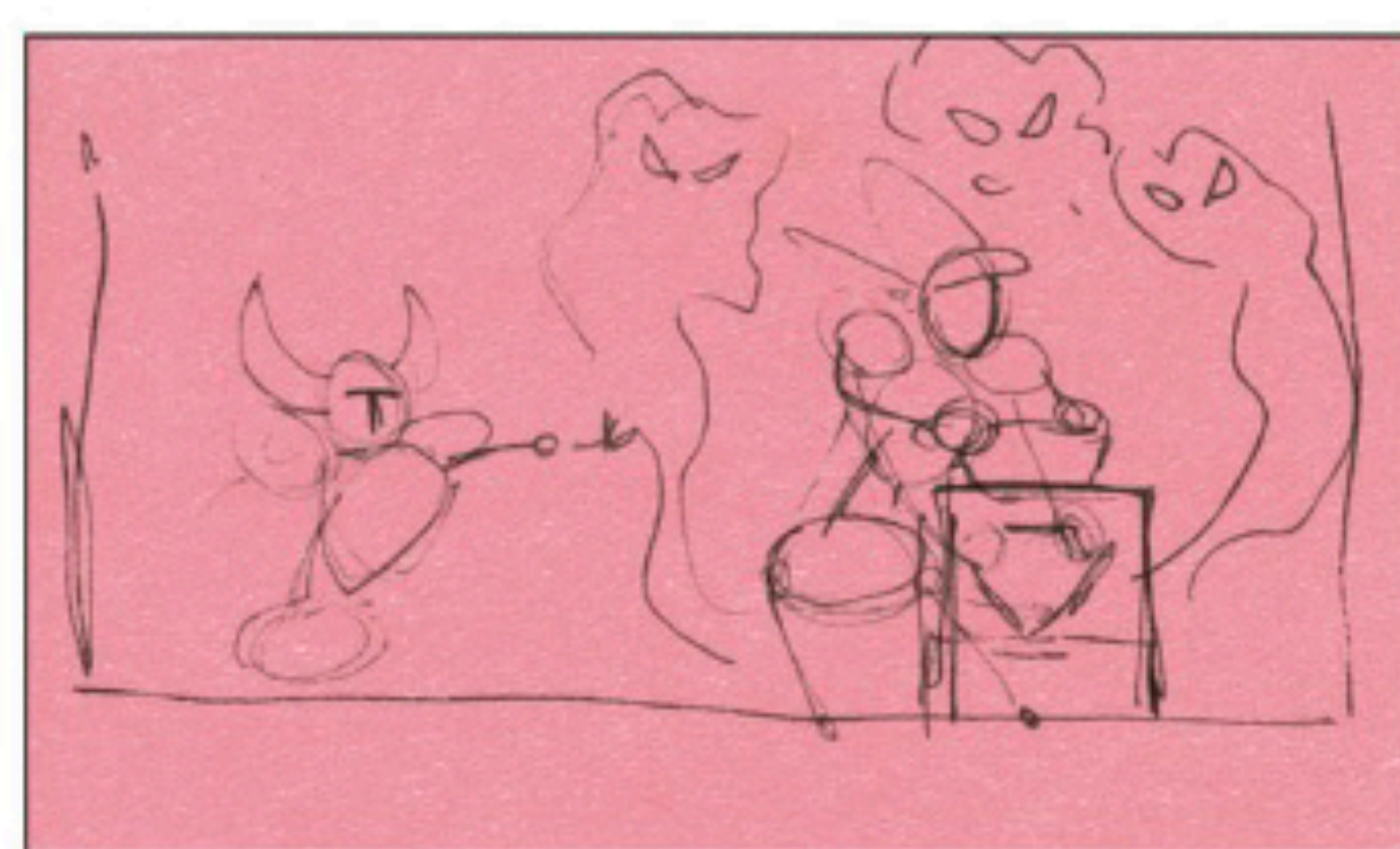
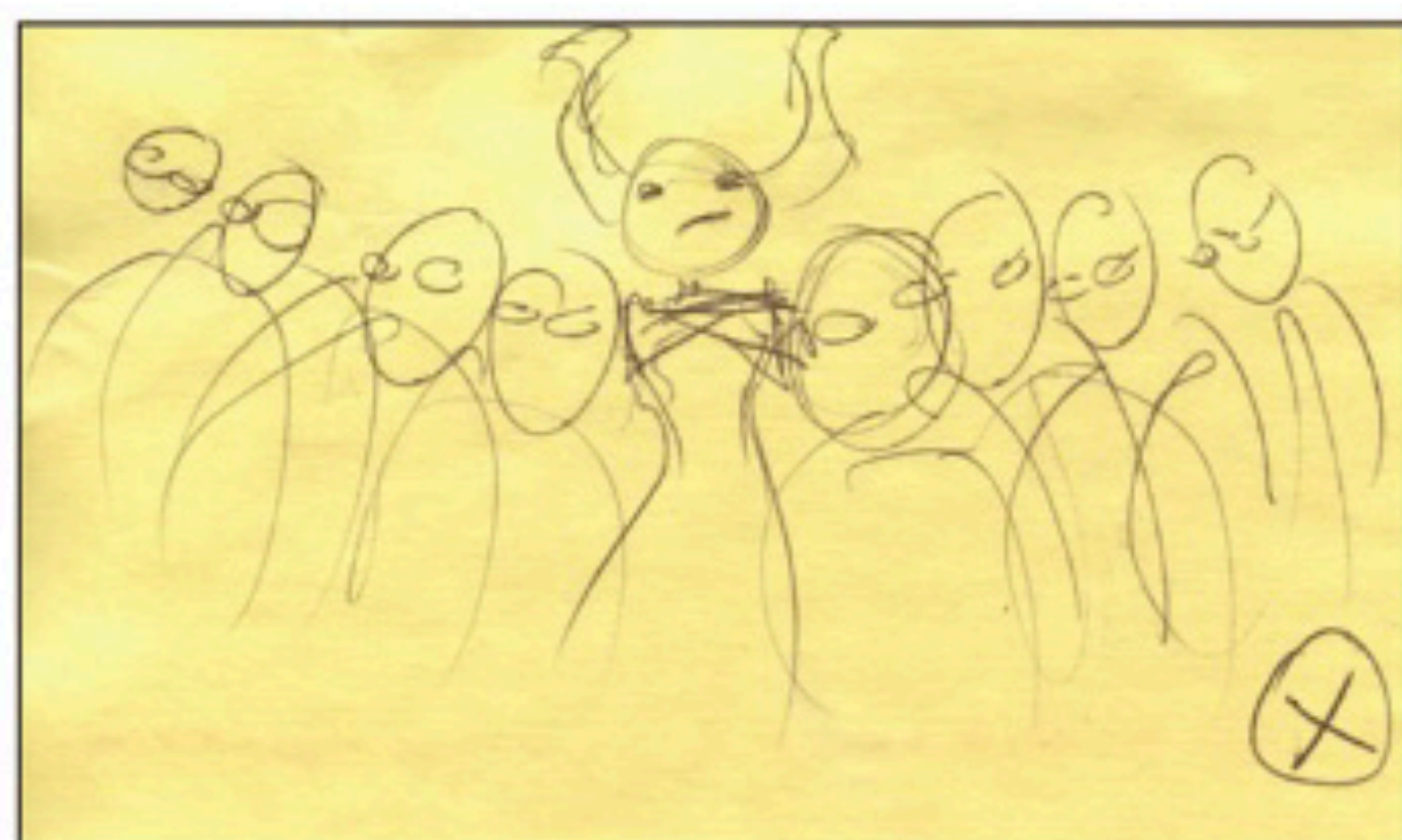
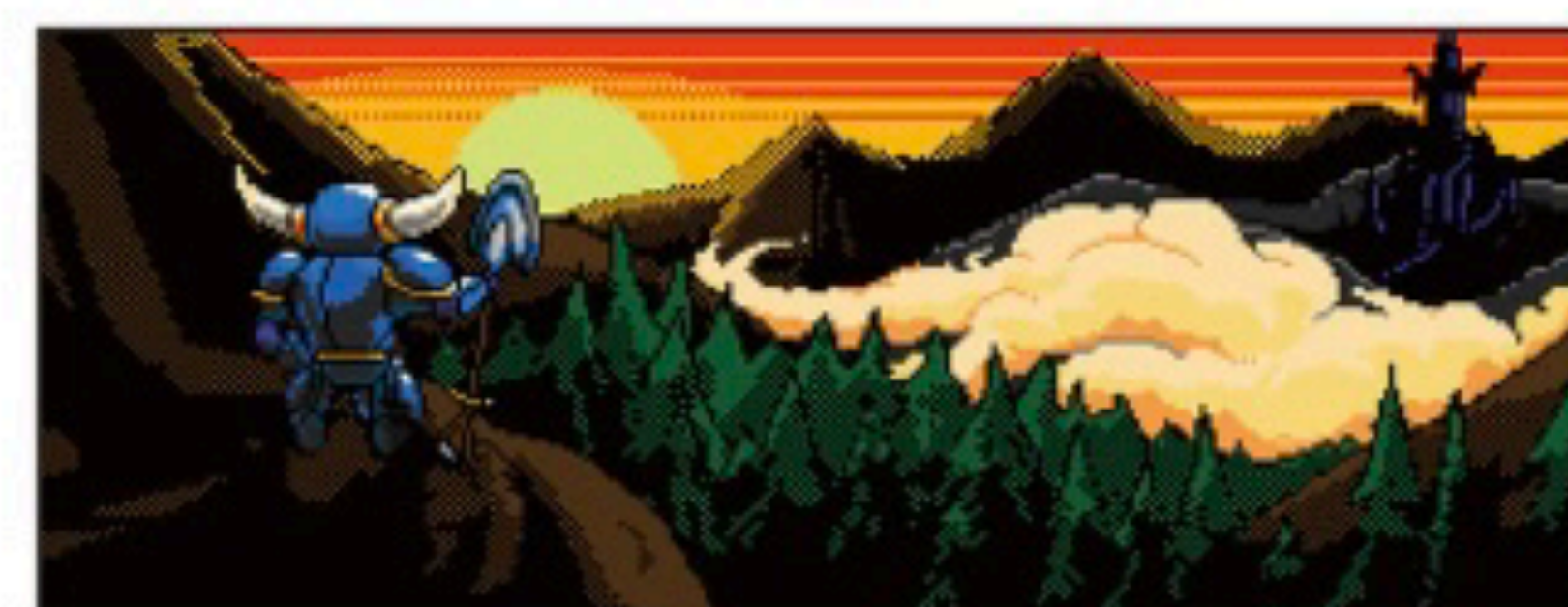
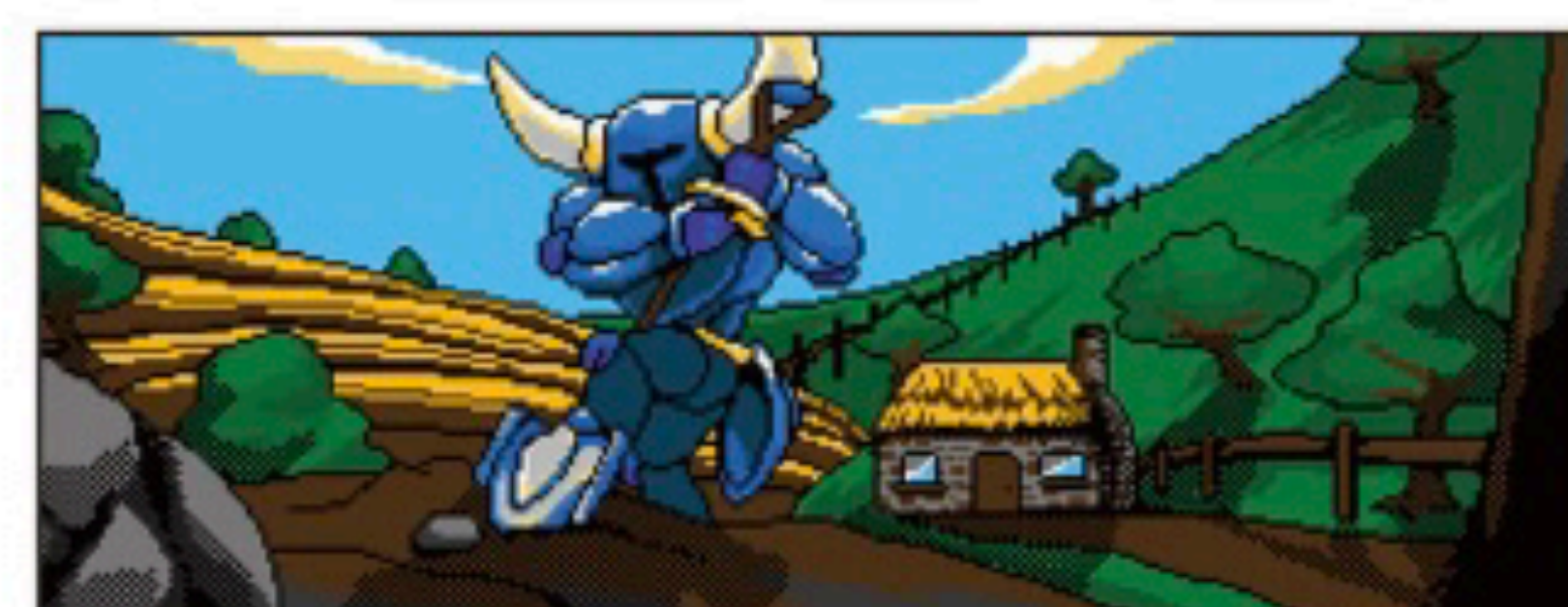
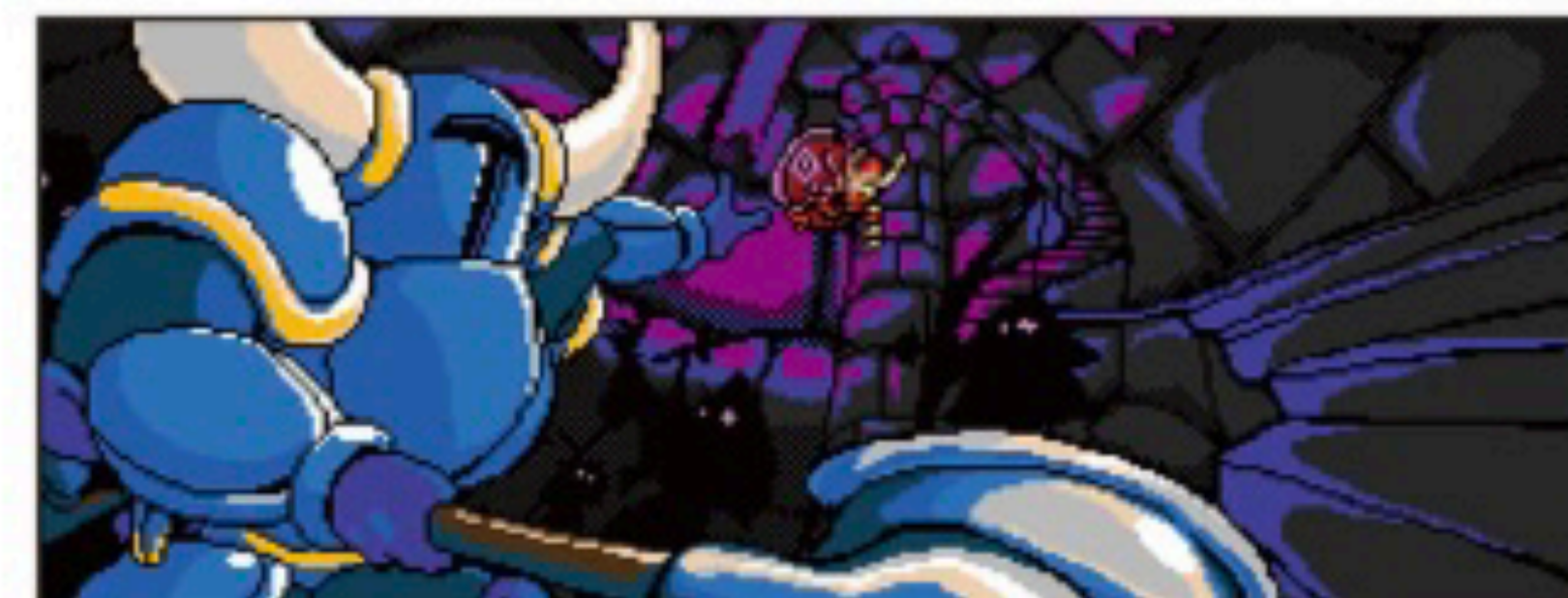
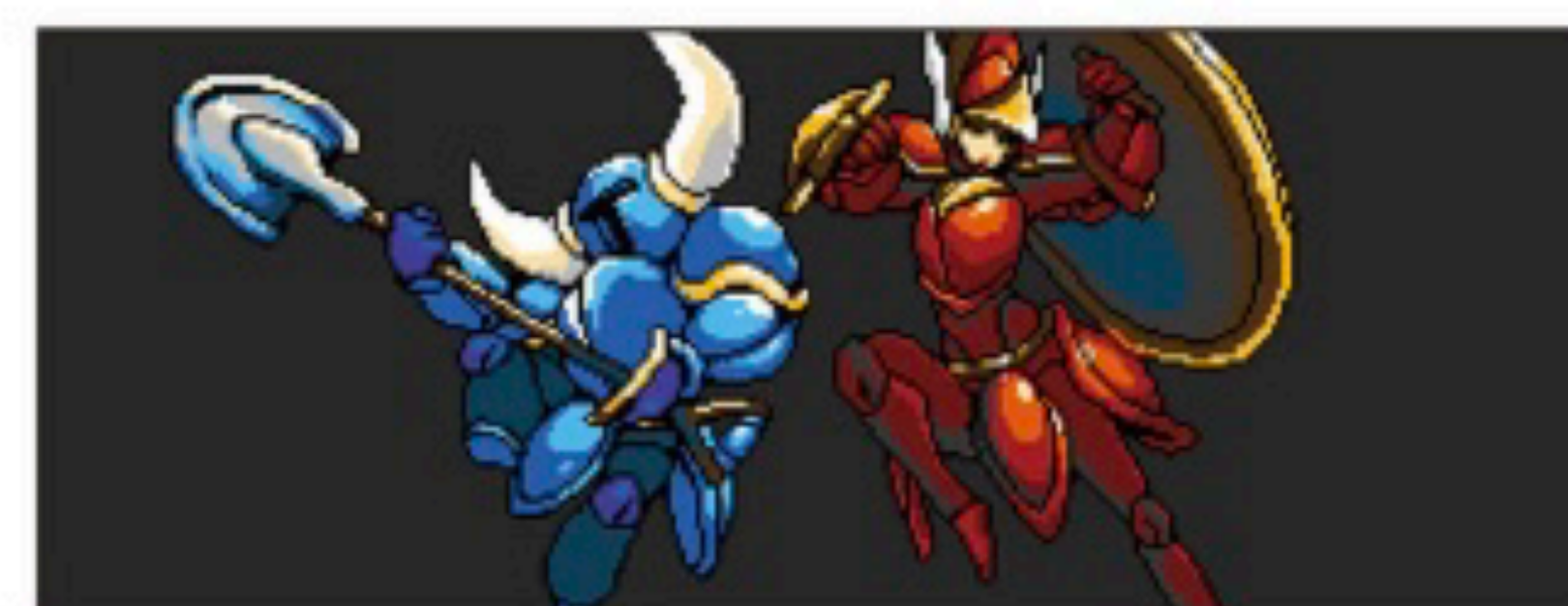
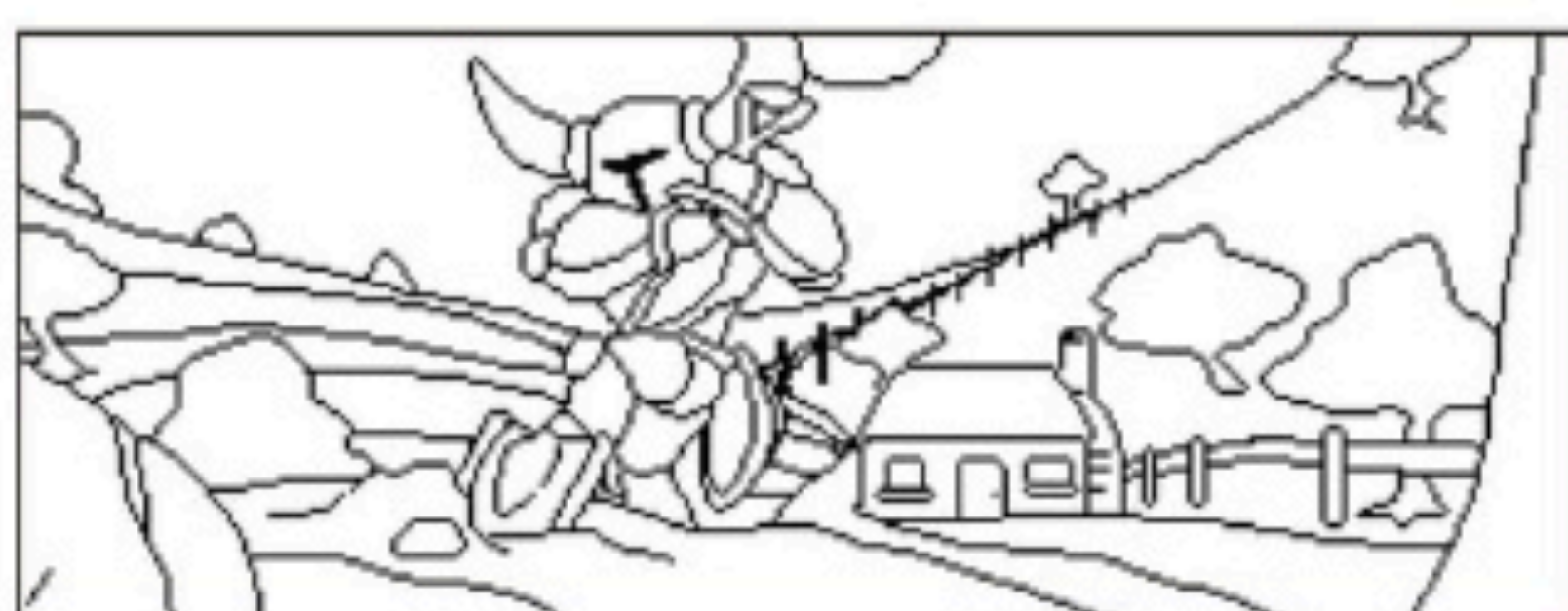
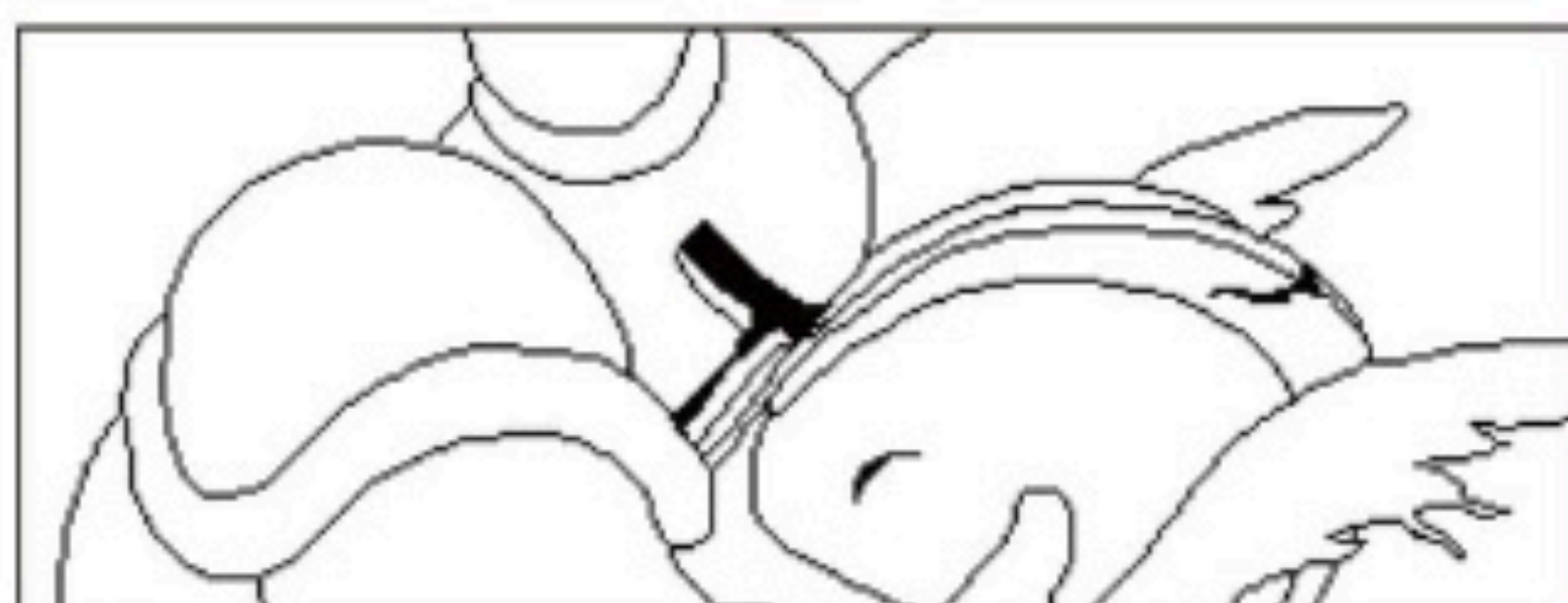
Without his beloved Shield Knight, Shovel Knight's adventuring days were over.  
He left the land and began a quiet life of solitude and training.



But while Shovel Knight was away, an evil power was rising.  
An army of evil knights has taken over the land.  
They call themselves the Order of No Quarter!

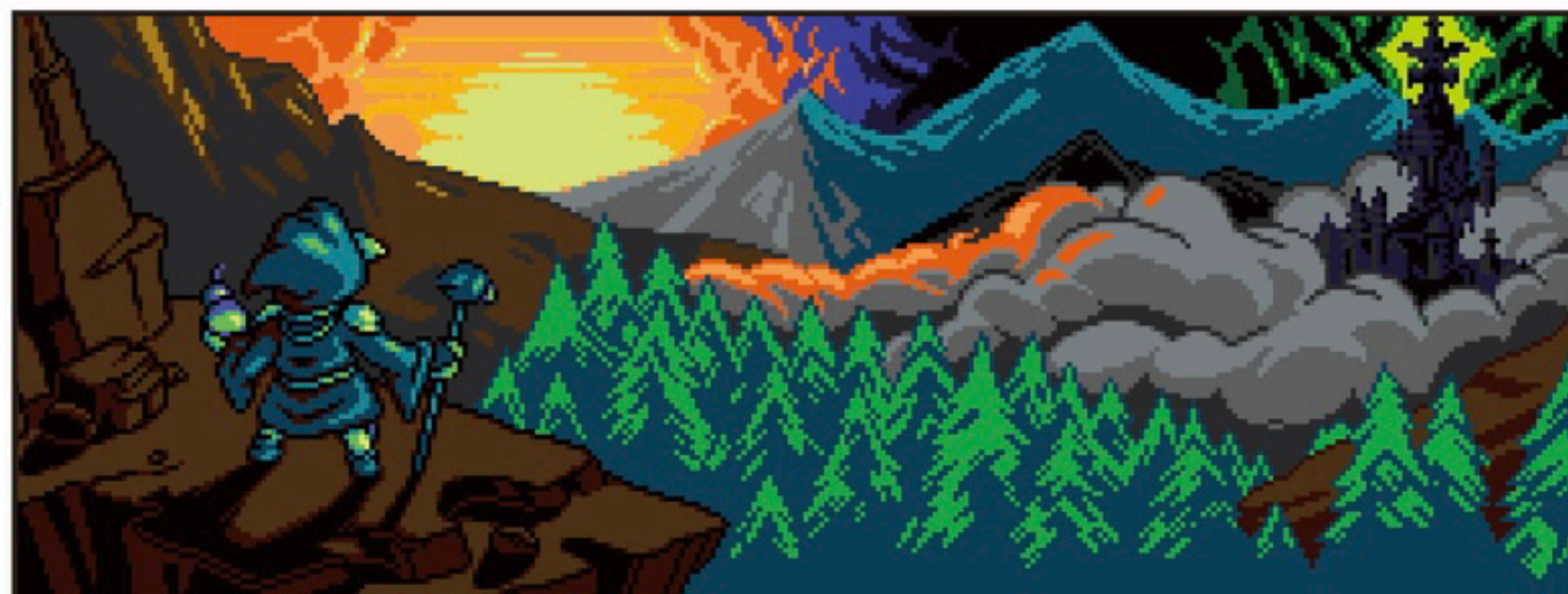
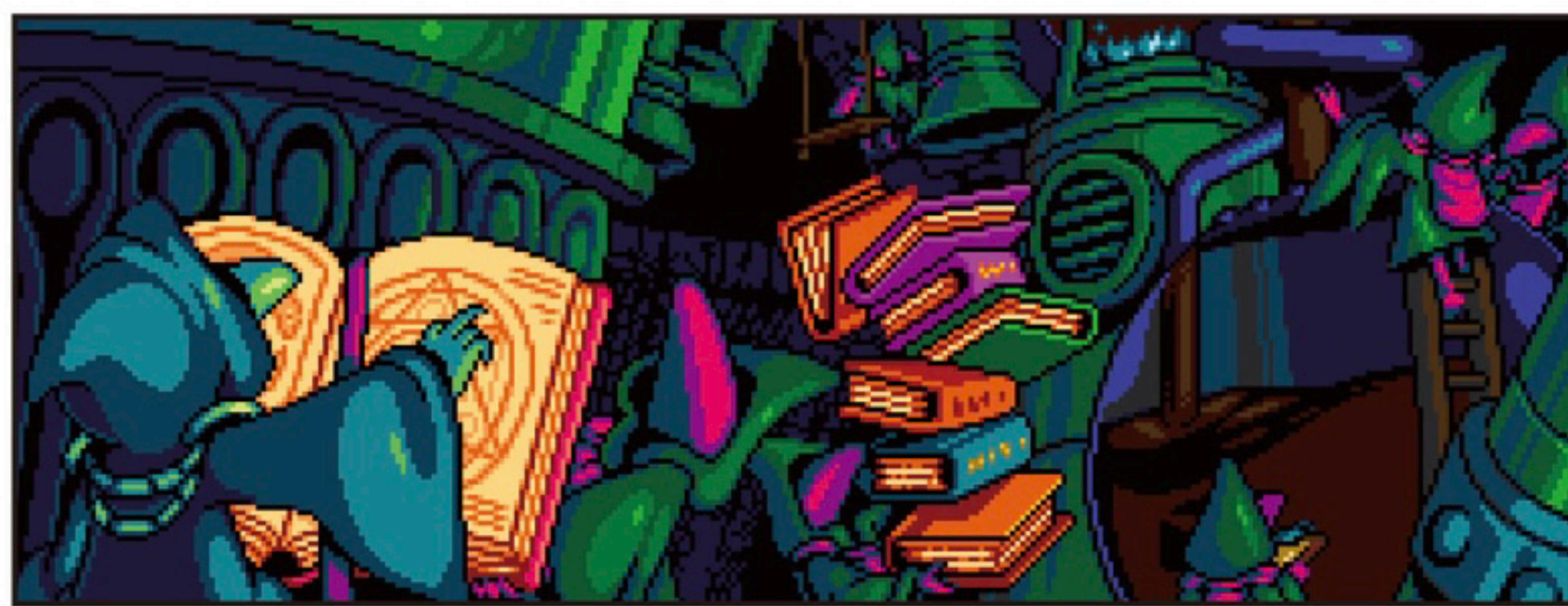
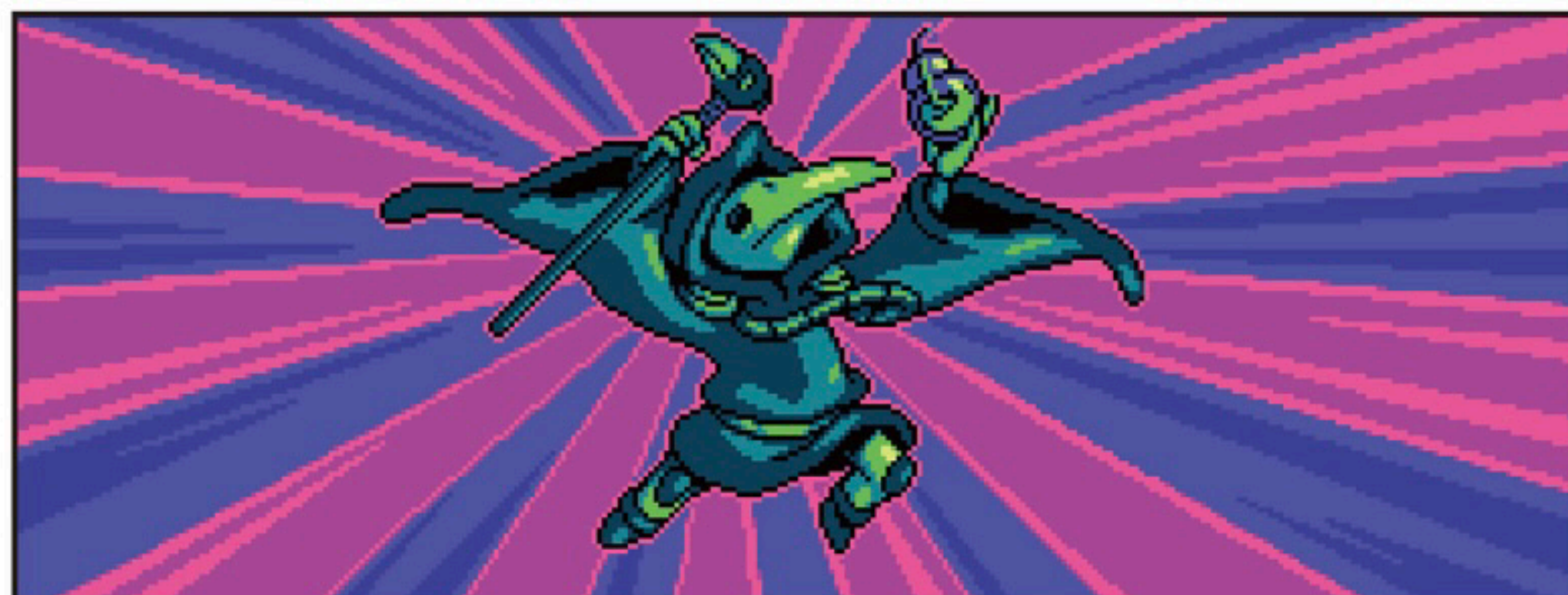


And now, evil magic is once again appearing from the Dark Tower.  
Shovel Knight is headed for the valley now, and a new adventure is  
about to begin...





# CUTSCENES (PLAGUE OF SHADOWS)

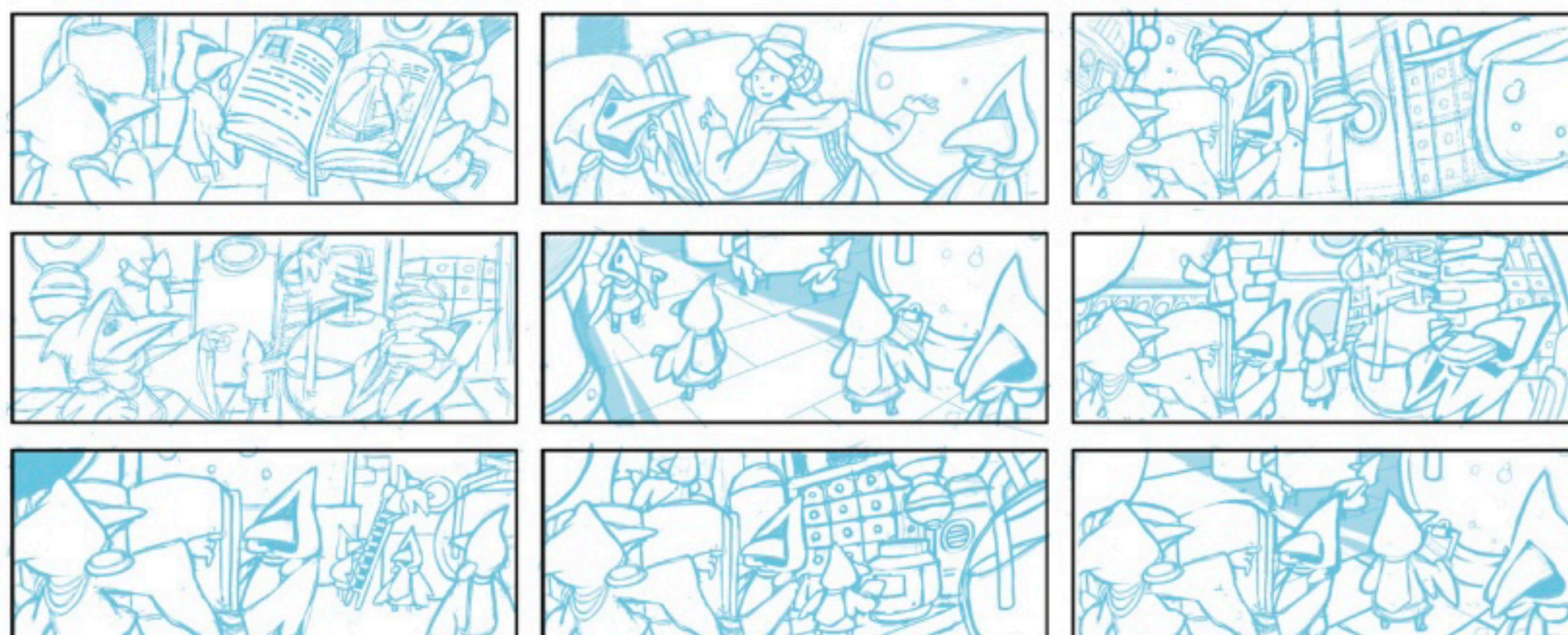


EXTRAS



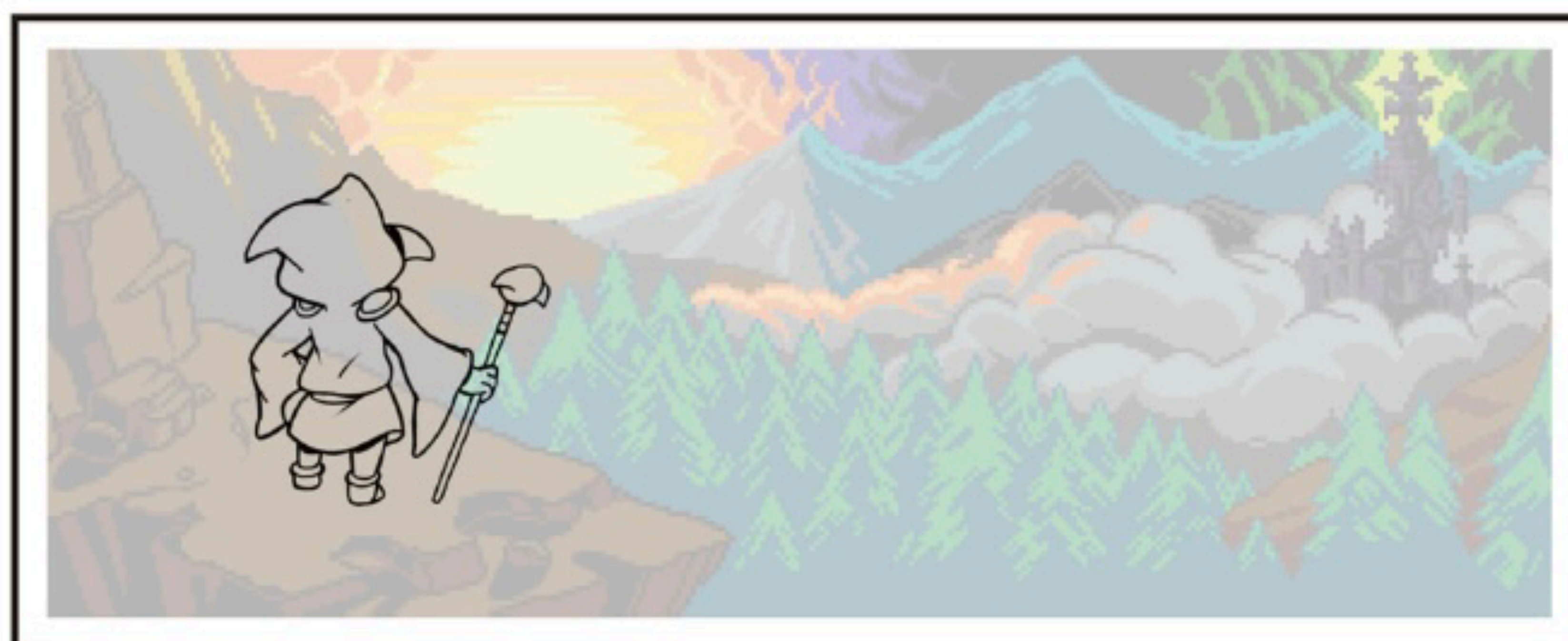


## DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



### DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*Initial storybook sketches hinted at the relationship between Plague Knight and Mona, but we decided to put more emphasis on their alchemical partnership instead.*





## DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

*Soulcalibur II's platform-specific characters inspired us to seek out cameos for the PlayStation and Xbox versions of Shovel Knight. It was an incredible honor to feature both the Battletoads and Kratos from God of War! We had a blast figuring out how to design these characters for Shovel Knight's world.*

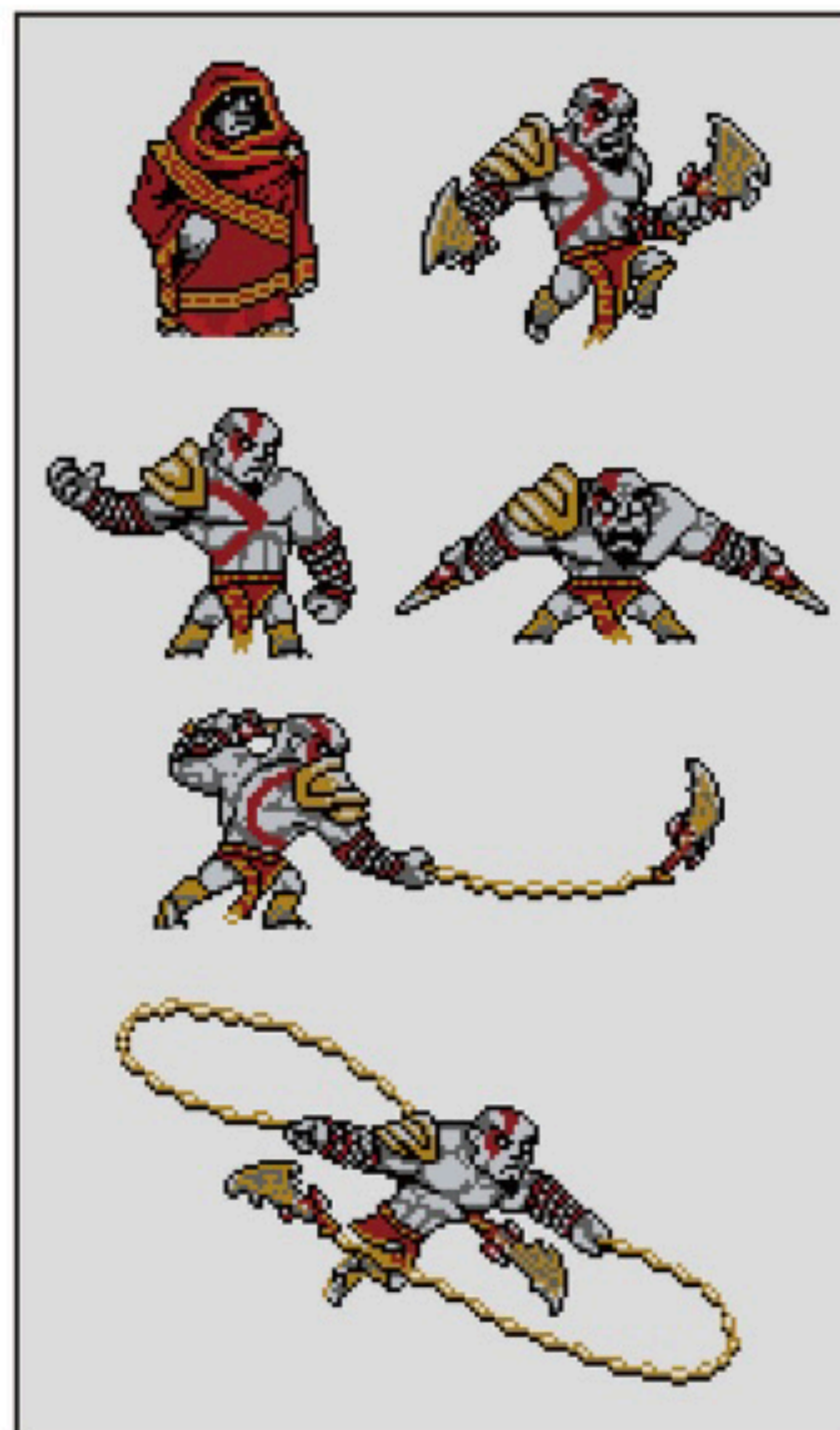
## GOD OF WAR CAMEO



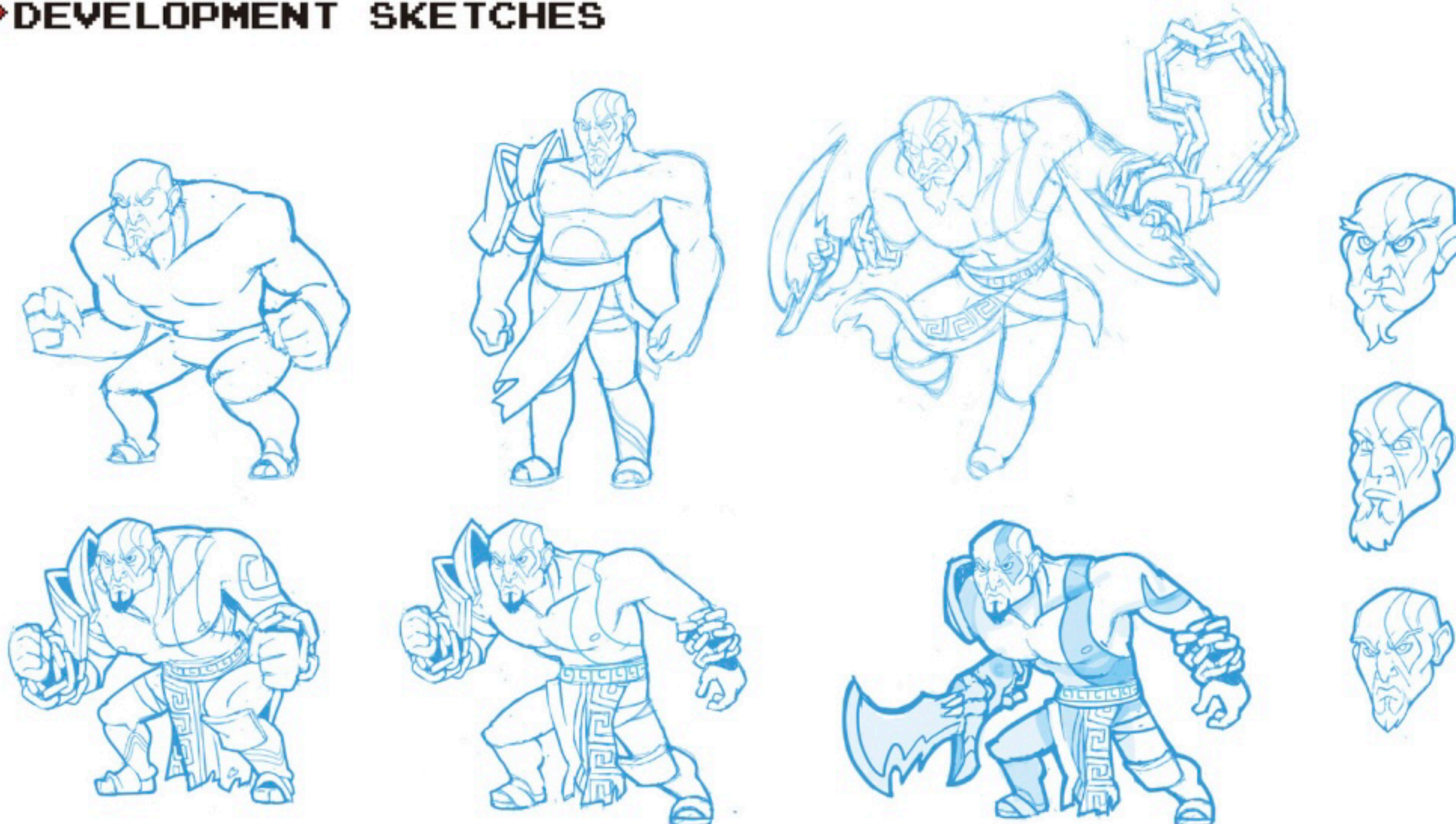
◆ KEY ART



■ GAME SPRITES



## ◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES



EXTRAS



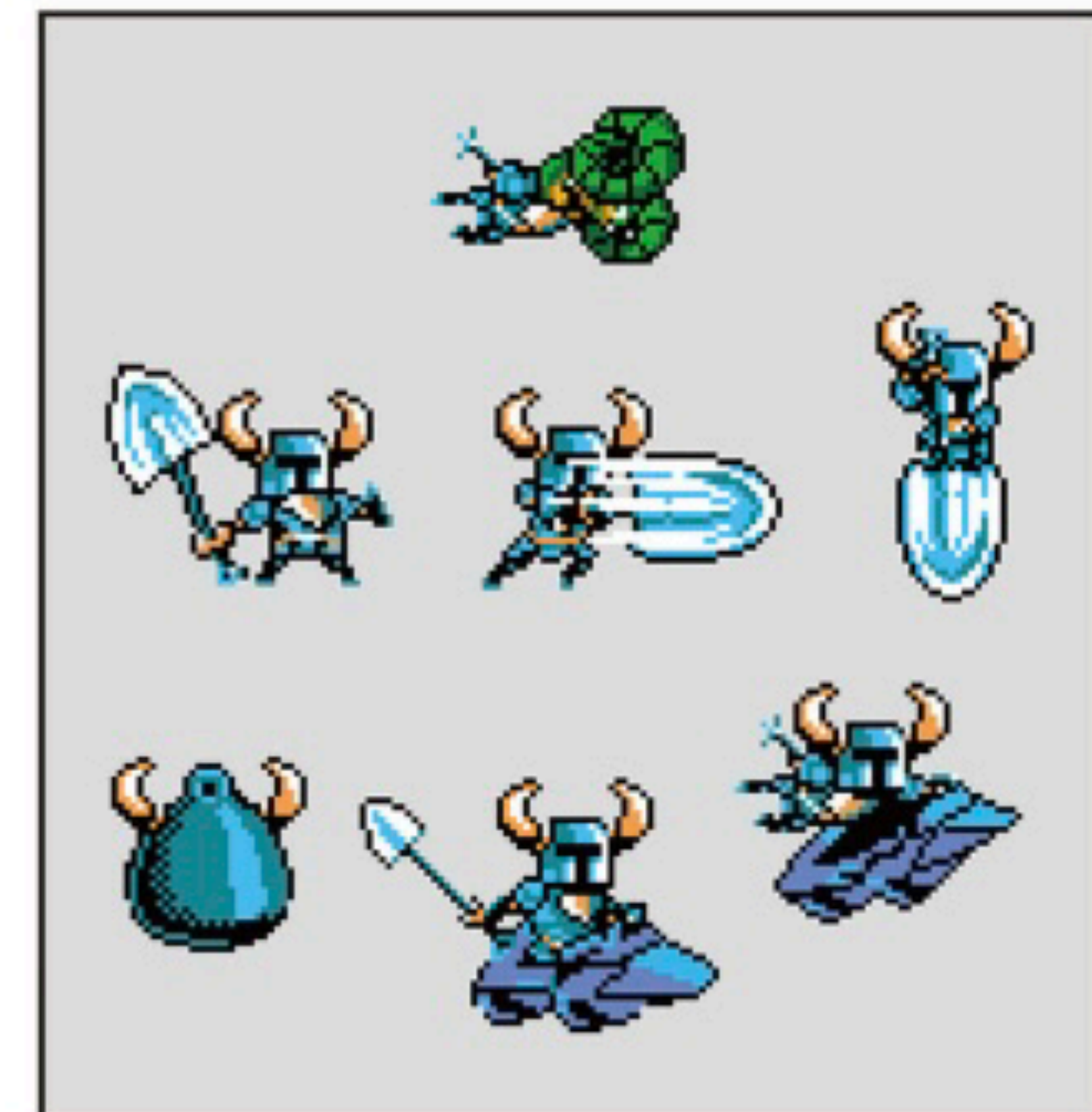


# BATTLETOADS CAMEO



◆ KEY ART

■ GAME SPRITES

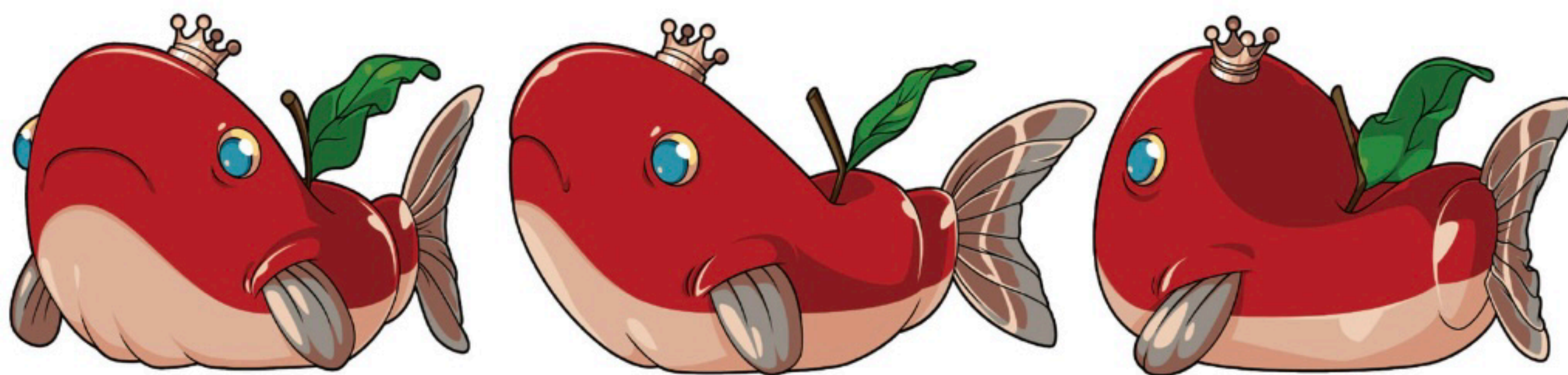


◆ DEVELOPMENT SKETCHES





# TURNAROUNDS



EXTRAS







## CHAPTER 6 BONUS

Not content to stop merely at “Extras,” we’ve prepared a whole Bonus chapter for you too! What better way to cap things off than with an eye-popping collection of inspired fan art and an in-depth interview with the talented development team behind *Shovel Knight*? (That’s a rhetorical question - there is no better way!) Whether it’s behind-the-scenes development anecdotes or even more *Shovel Knight* art you want, you’ll find them both here in this final chapter. We hope you “dig” it!



# INTERVIEW

**UDON** sits down with the team at Yacht Club Games to discuss all things *Shovel Knight*.



## KICKSTARTER: A LEGEND IS CROWDFUNDED

**UDON:** Thank you all for sitting down with me today! Let's jump right in and start at the very beginning. *Shovel Knight* obviously wouldn't exist without Yacht Club Games, so how did you all get your start? How did the Yacht Club yacht "set sail," as it were?

**YACHT CLUB GAMES:** We started out all together at our previous company on various different titles, and for the last few projects we kind of came together and learned how to work together as a crew and, like, how our strengths and weaknesses worked with each other... That was during *Double Dragon Neon* and *BloodRayne: Betrayal*. Once those projects were finished, instead of dispersing into the rest of the company and becoming part of a much larger whole, we decided to stick together and try to figure out a way to work together. We had initial ideas of maybe doing that within our previous company, and then... those didn't work out, and so we just decided, well, we'll just start our own. Like, let's do it. Let's... you know, "jump into the deep waters" as it were. (laughs)



Was Yacht Club Games originally established solely to develop and produce *Shovel Knight* with no real concrete plans thereafter, or did you go in thinking "This is going to be the first of many hits," with a long-term plan in mind?

We actually had other... We were working on another game title previously, before *Shovel Knight*, and we were working on it... you know, in the cracks of time that we had. We were working on it the same way, carrying over the team style that we had, iterating on it... and we weren't really super happy with where it was, and it was only after that that we decided to pivot to *Shovel Knight* and focus on something completely different.

What's it like, then, to be a fledgling indie developer whose hopes are really just pinned on the reception of a crowdfunding campaign? Do you still remember how you felt when you first launched the *Shovel Knight* Kickstarter?

Yeah... it was crazy. (laughs) It was, like, really stressful... but I think we all had confidence in what we were doing and we had seen, you know,

Kickstarter work on other projects, and we knew that if... like, if anybody could do a Kickstarter, we felt that we could do it too. (laughs) You know, we just felt like we had a lot to offer. We also felt like we could make a fun game, like we had the game part down. It was a weird thing where we felt like we were making good games but no one was playing them... (laughs) So it was sort of that feeling like, well, if we're behind the marketing and we're behind it pushing it, everyone will play it this time; if we could just control everything, then we could make it a success. Kickstarter offered the option to control everything, but we sort of had that feeling at the same time, like... well, is that really true? Is that really how it's going to work out? Or is it going to be like how it's been with every other game we've ever put out, which is like no one's ever seen them?

Right.

But even if we sold... a fraction of the amount that *Shovel Knight* ended up selling, right? Like even if we sold the amounts of some of our other games, it could have still been a success for us. Like even if we only sold, you know, 75,000 copies of the game or something like that, that's a number that would be pretty easy to hit. We thought, you know, breaking even... it's like, it's not the most insanely risky thing in the entire world. We just had no... you know, we just didn't know it would be as big as it got.

Sure. Well then, going off of that, how quickly did it really become clear to you that there was a genuine thirst for a game like *Shovel Knight*? Did you kind of have a feeling the Kickstarter might do well, or were you really just blindsided by how much it took off?

In the beginning, it didn't take off at all. For the first couple of weeks, we were very uncertain about *Shovel Knight*, about even hitting the initial funding goal. So we were trying to just send it out to everyone who was interested, we were trying to, like, you know... update images and reveal new characters and all that. It really wasn't until we brought it to PAX East for the first time that we were able to have people come up and play it... have people talk about it, or see it on-screen and get excited about it. That was when I would say we felt that there were people who were definitely looking for a game like this.

People were excited in the Kickstarter comments, and they were like... people were engaged and excited about what was happening, but it wasn't until after PAX that we even started doing, like, daily updates and we started getting into YouTube. When some high-profile YouTube content makers started playing it on their channel, that was when it really exploded. At that point, it was like an exponential climb to the top.







When we went to PAX, we were basically a little more than half-funded... *(laughs)* ...to give you an idea of how far off we were. To go off what you were saying about when we felt like people were craving this game, it was definitely when we were at PAX. Because when we were having people play it, you could sort of see their eyes light up, like "Oh my god, I haven't seen this in so long! I've been craving this!" People would come up and tell us about their favorite NES game or their favorite, like, *Mega Man* game. It's like, "Man, I remember playing *Castlevania* with my friends and we could never beat Frankenstein..." They would just come up and share stories about games like this and they would be excited to tell us.

Especially compared to... before, we made a game and we put it out, but we never interacted with people. We never talked to anybody. So when we launched the Kickstarter and there was a post on IGN or whatever, it's like... there are a few comments we'd always see, right? But when we actually went to the convention and everyone was like... there was, like, a huge line of people playing it... it was crazy. It was really energizing in a weird way. PAX was like a really huge injection of energy and excitement about the game.

**You said that when you went to PAX, you were only about half-funded Kickstarter-wise. Was there a clear separation between that crowd-funding segment and principal development? Did you only start on large-scale development after you got the funding, or were you just hoping you were going to get the money you needed as you went along?**

The PAX demo was just the demo. It was only King Knight, only the Pridemoor level, and we only worked on it for what, like a few weeks? Two weeks. It was a very focused two weeks. Like, just Shovel Knight running around... That was made within a month of going to PAX. And even the Kickstarter trailer... like, all the screens you see in there are exactly what the game had ready. There was no hidden boss fight or anything like that. Some of those screens were just made up in Flash! *(laughs)* Well, only the Tinker Knight one was... and the conversation with King Knight, because we didn't have the dialogue system ready yet.

**What was it like essentially co-developing *Shovel Knight* with such a huge community of backers, then? What would you say are the advantages and risks of developing in that kind of "open" way?**

Going to the show was really good – like we were just talking about – for feedback. For the whole development of *Shovel Knight*, we basically had the game front and center at a bunch of shows and so many people had it in their hands. So I would say that during development, we used all of that

feedback and integrated it back into how we ended up making the game. We had Google Hangouts and backer updates for the backers, too. In a way, the backer updates sort of formed our method of communication that we still carry through in our website updates today. Like, we would do an update every now and again to check in on where we were at – we would post a GIF or an image, and that kind of set the tone for something we're still doing today with updates.

People would give suggestions, but it was also more... like, when you go to a show [and play the game], you're picking up gold but you don't know what it does. So players would be like, "What does the gold do? Does it let me buy armor? Does it let me buy new items? Can I upgrade myself?" Meanwhile, by having expectations about that, they were giving us ideas about what we might want to put in the final game. We were also having our Google Hangouts, where people were literally giving boss pattern ideas that ended up in the final game. Like Tinker Knight, Polar Knight... those levels and those bosses were made by sketching them out on a whiteboard in a Google Hangout, at least to get the initial seeds of the ideas. It's really great just to have that feedback, because you have an idea, and maybe the six people in the room like it, but when there's an aspect of it that you didn't necessarily all agree on or think about, and then the group of people you've shown it to is now suddenly excited about it, you're like, "Oh, maybe we should rethink this."

There's also a sense of... like, we're thinking about this every day and so it's easy to get kind of lost in it, but every now and again we'd resurface to post an update or to post a lot of information, and to see that people were excited about it or intrigued by it – we just had that recently [with the *Specter of Torment* announcement] – that kind of helps us get excited about it again ourselves.

**If you could travel back in time and talk to yourselves just prior to launching your Kickstarter, what would you tell yourselves now with the benefit of hindsight?**

Don't give away a bunch of free stretch goals. *(everyone laughs)* We're still working on stretch goals two years after release, and they're fun – it's really cool to go back and do that – but it's still a lot of retreading and a lot of work. We've burned, like, two years of time making stretch goal content when we could have been making something else. That's what I would tell us. Yeah, so don't promise boss campaigns! *(laughs)*

But don't get us wrong – we're excited for them and they're really cool! That's why they're taking so long... because we get excited, and we don't want to put out crap. We love what we did with Plague Knight. I think we



enjoy over-delivering, we enjoy surprising [people], and things like that. So for a big feature like that, like a campaign... all the expectations that brings, and how we want to do it better than we've seen other games do it... that's what makes us want to make it bigger than it is. But there's a whole bunch of technical issues and hurdles with free updates and how people perceive them, and how they can get them... and it would be nice to have some flexibility [to get around that].

## ORIGINS: THE BIRTH OF SHOVEL KNIGHT

Moving on then, which came first: Shovel Knight the character, or *Shovel Knight* the game concept? What I mean by that is, could we have just as easily seen Shovel Knight in a different kind of game, or a retro 2D platformer starring a different character?

It was always going to be a 2D platformer. It's like, let's make a 2D platformer; let's make something that's like *Zelda II*; let's make something that's like *Mega Man*; let's make something in the NES style, because that plays to our strengths. We're a small team and we're used to making platformers; we've made a whole bunch in the past. If we make an 8-bit game, then we can generate all the art ourselves without outsourcing anything and ensure that it's really super high-quality top to bottom. We can make changes if we need to, we can make one-offs if we need to. Plus it's like, this is a genre that we're passionate about; these are games we enjoy playing ourselves, so that all fed into it.



So you knew from the beginning then that you were going to make a 2D platformer, and then the Shovel Knight character came after that?

Right, from the gameplay concepts of, like, *Zelda II* – down-thrusting things – and swordplay in other games, like the slashing and going through blocks and all that. All the main gameplay stuff that you see in *Shovel Knight* is pretty much... the actions of the character are what we based the whole game concept on, and then the visuals and aesthetics and all that kind of came afterward.

As video game characters go, it's kind of hard to describe, but Shovel Knight has this kind of instantly understandable, very straightforward design sense to him in that he looks like he walked right out of a lost NES game. He looks like he fits in naturally right next to the likes of Mario, Sonic, and Mega Man. Was that fully or partially by design, or was that just a really happy accident?

From the beginning, we wanted something that was iconic in silhouette and really easy to read, and really... like a generic knight kind of guy. And as far as how he looks alongside his contemporaries, I think that's mainly because we really tried to make him feel “NES-like” without being too stuck to the NES. We embraced the idea that this is like an NES throwback kind of game, where it feels like a contemporary of those games, and we tried to tune the gameplay and mechanics of the world and art all toward that goal. So I would say it was a conscious effort on our part to make that happen.

What was the inspiration for *Shovel Knight's* overall scenario and setting? How did you decide on the traditional fantasy setting with this interestingly whimsical tone?



I think the tone is just kind of what we would do anyway. Like, if you go back and play the other games we've worked on as a team, they sort of have that same goofy, lighthearted tone that is in *Shovel Knight*. As far as the scenario and everything, it was... it just came about from us trying to make sense of it all from the gameplay. So it's like hey, we're going to do *Shovel Knight*, it's going to be like *Zelda II*, it's going to be like *Mega Man*. Instead of eight bosses, we're going to have eight knights, right? Like, we should fight eight things, right? Should you be able to fight them in any order, or should it be on a world map?

Ultimately we decided we should go visit unique locations for each boss and have those locations determine the bosses' designs. Yeah – the location was the first thing, and the knight came afterward. So it's like, we want to go to a spooky graveyard, so we should fight, like, a Grim Reaper guy. We're going to go to an underground area with lava, so there should be like a lava/fire/underground guy, right? We tried to fill out the entire roster of characters with the silhouettes of, like, there should be one tall and skinny guy, one more portly guy, some average characters... we were trying to create a good lineup of sizes, shapes, and themes and put it all together as one cohesive whole.

Everything else came out of those basic ideas. Like, the towns... We thought, “Okay, what if we had a *Zelda II*-like town, but instead of having a bunch of random NPCs walking by, we tried to inject a little bit more personality and flavor into those characters?” It ended up growing a lot larger than we thought it was going to with regard to the story and character stuff, but we just kind of let it go and we did what we thought was best in terms of having a light touch for it, but also injecting enough to give it some personality.

It's a weird in-between of embellishing and making things bigger, but also restraining it so it feels like it still belongs in a retro-inspired world. Like, no character says more than a few lines of dialogue. We tried to pack as much information as possible into just a sprite, right? You're packing as much information as you can into the smallest space possible. I think that “economy” is a big part of what drove *Shovel Knight*, even though it's a game that's so expansive in scope, every part of it has that level of economy, so it's like we're not wasting the player's time.

Even just writing and looking over the script, we would go, “Okay, here's what Black Knight says. He needs to talk about this, this, and this, and this needs to be conveyed.” And it would all be written up, and then we'd embellish it, but sometimes we'd be like, “Oh, but that goes into three dialogue boxes – too many! How can he do all that but in two dialogue boxes, or even one? What if he says half of it and Shovel Knight finishes it by retorting?” That's the difference between having a conversation where you have to press the button three times versus a snappier conversation.

This is a perfect time to get into talking about the story and characters a bit. *Shovel Knight* obviously doesn't have a particularly heavy focus on story, but one of the most memorable things about the game for me was just how much heart the story had when I wasn't necessarily expecting it. Was that something you really wanted to accomplish from the beginning?

Yes. The tone of the game is something we tried really hard to nail down from the very outset. It was going to be a game that's kind of funny, and kind of adventurous, and maybe kind of sad sometimes... something that's heartwarming overall. Like, Shovel Knight sitting there under the stars at the campfire was one of the first images of the entire thing that anchored how it was going to feel.

We would also – as we were talking with each other over HipChat or Slack or whatever – we would be talking in the voices of the characters a lot, just playing around, but also because it's fun to get to know a character by saying what they would say. Like, how would Shovel Knight act in this situation? Or how would Tinker Knight... like, Tinker Knight's personality is he's a small guy trying to make himself big, so how would he react to this situation? Talking in the characters' voices was a good way for us to sort of get to know the characters, and also help cement ideas – what's funny, what works, and what we all kind of agree on.



The story was something we discussed for the longest time; it was one of the last parts of the game to be finalized. We had these large meetings about the script where we'd print everything out, talk about the big ideas, and go over what needed to be switched around because it wasn't working. We put a lot of attention on the story.

It came out of the same place that all the other inspiration did. You know, we were looking at NES games like *Mega Man*, where it's like yeah, there's not much story there or whatever, but you feel like there's a somberness to the character, that he's the only one like him, a lone hero. You can put a lot of yourself into it and get what you want out of it, and we were trying to go after those same things.

I would say *Shovel Knight's* emotional hook is based on the idea of losing a loved one; in this case that's Shield Knight, and Shovel Knight goes after her. We can see from the designs in this book that Shield Knight initially started out simply as a concept character named "Beloved." Can you talk about this early version of the character and how she became the Shield Knight that fans know and love today?

The character just started out as a generic princess, like "Hey, you're going to save the princess!" The initial idea of *Shovel Knight* was that [Shovel Knight] would go all the way to the end, and then he would kill the Enchantress, but it's Shield Knight. So she dies, and then he has to bury her... like, with the shovel.



Wow... that's pretty somber. (laughs)

(everyone laughs) That was the initial plot, right? It was like, you would have to bury her yourself with the shovel. It was, of course, an early draft in one sense, but that's also the story we had for like 90 percent of development. It just kept going until we implemented the end [into the game]. The game came out in June [2014], and we didn't make that call until December [2013]. Like, Shield Knight died up until December.

So... what caused you to change your minds about that?

Because, like, everyone would have hated it. (everyone laughs) Our tone didn't really support it. We weren't making a game where the main thrust of the story was supposed to be so somber and sad, with a character dying in a tragic way. There wasn't enough emotional development in the story to support an idea like that. We had to nerf it.

As far as "Beloved" goes, that was placeholder until we really figured out what that character was going to be. The reason why she's Shield Knight now – and I think you can kind of see this in her design – is because Shield Knight is equal to Shovel Knight in our eyes. They're partners in adventuring, which is why Shield Knight's armor is exactly like Shovel Knight's, just tweaked a little bit. It's not like she's the sexier version or whatever; she's a knight in her own right and has her own abilities and desires and is, like, her own character.

That was intentional, then? In other words, did you specifically set out to avoid sexualizing Shield Knight and other female characters in a way that didn't feel organic to the world you were building?

Yeah. When we were doing the art and turnarounds or whatever and getting each character's details down and defining them, we made sure the characters didn't come across as sexier than they should be; Shield Knight and Shovel Knight should be equals in that regard. There are characters that are more attractive or play to that "sexy" vibe more – Propeller Knight is a good example of that – but it's not like it's overt in any way. Sexualizing the characters is not something we took lightly in general.

Speaking of Propeller Knight, any hero is only as good as their adversaries, and in this case that would be the Enchantress and The Order of No Quarter. Can you talk a little bit about the villains as a whole and how they came to be?

We were talking about how they came from the environments, right? So it's like, we wanted to have the ghost area. We wanted to have the explode-y alchemy lab. We wanted to have an airship level where you fall a lot. We wanted to have an underwater level... so all of the [boss] characters came from that, I would say. They all needed to be a little bit different; we tried to build them around some visual thing or gimmick. In general, the bosses were not designed simply as bosses; they were made "character first." So it wasn't like, "What's Mole Knight going to do?" It was more like, "What's Mole Knight going to look like, and what are his themes?" And we would design the boss battle after that.



You can see this in the book, but we had early concepts of each character, and those early concepts were basically whiteboard drawings that were done based on each knight's most basic concepts. Like, "Okay, we have this knight, and he's going to be scary and ghostly. What should he be/look like?" And then a quick early concept drawing was done just to really capture the idea of what he could be, and those elements kind of carried through and directed the rest of the development for the visuals. Some of that changed a lot, but a lot of it stayed the same as well. Like, Tinker Knight is a good example. Tinker Knight started as a big, buff welder guy with a hammer that had fire on both sides or whatever, and he slowly kind of became the stout, small tinkerer that he is now. But he still has the same mask, the same apron... like, he's a guy in a welder mask. Propeller Knight is a guy with a propeller on his head. Mole Knight is a guy with claws. Like, all that stuff was set, and then it was just figuring out the rest of it and tuning how they work as a lineup. Like, you want the big guy, the tall guy, the skinny guy, the short guy, the big, giant behemoth guy, and then their personalities just came from that... it's like, how they looked or what their theme was fed into how they would act. You know, we really love *Mega Man* bosses, but they don't have that much personality, so it was like, "Let's see if we can inject a little bit more personality in there." Well, they did have personalities in the cartoon show... you know, that *Mega Man* cartoon show. (laughs)

Oh my god, that *Mega Man* cartoon... (laughs)

Because it's a blank slate, right? It's like, "Oh yeah, I guess Cut Man is a guy with an Igor voice..."

Yeah, that... his voice was so weird. (laughs)

I guess it was kind of all those elements all put together, and then trying to make sure that they all played off of each other, and trying to make sure they were unique in their own way. Like Mole Knight, he's like a mole/fire guy in a lava level. But that's been done like a million times, stuff like that... so then we introduced the goo and, like, it turning [the lava] green and bouncing you around and doing all of that, and that kind of made the twist on the level and the character a little bit different. So it's like, we knew



we were exploring ground that had already been well tread, and I think we were aware of that and tried to do something that was a little bit different.

**Were there any specific knights in *The Order of No Quarter* that kind of became office favorites as development progressed?**

Yeah, a few. *(everyone laughs)* King Knight is definitely a favorite – he was one of the earliest favorites, at least – and he’s one of the easiest to go to when this question comes up. Although when we had our original Kickstarter poll for the different characters that backers wanted playable, I would say that we all had different favorites. But if we had blind boxes of figurines of all the knights, they would probably all get taken back to everyone’s desks... I don’t know if there are any that we would, like, toss aside or put on a pedestal. But we always go back to King Knight, just because King Knight feels the most representative of everything.

*(laughs)*

Like, he represents our tendencies toward tone and goofiness, right? I feel like there are very few places – like, development studios – on the planet that would come up with a king-themed knight. *(everyone laughs)* And his boss battle is very simple, but goofy at the same time. It just has all the character there. The ideas that spring up around King Knight are those that are the goofiest and silliest, so if we have a dumb idea, we’ll center it around King Knight or the Super Skeleton or whatever... but usually it’s King Knight.

**How does Black Knight fit into all of this? Based on his in-game dialogue, he seems to have a history with Shield Knight and Shovel Knight, and we know he kind of sees himself as Shovel Knight’s rival. Usually, a rival pushes the hero to their very limits, but Black Knight kind of comes off as more of a punching bag. Were you consciously trying to turn that rival archetype on its ear with Black Knight?**

Not particularly. I think that just came out of... *(laughs)* Like, we were always just using Black Knight to move the plot along!

*(laughs)*

It was for convenience. Like okay, there’s Shovel Knight, the main character... and then, like, he has no friends. And then there’s Black Knight, and then there’s *The Order of No Quarter* and the Enchantress, and that’s it. So if we want to have story development happen, then... like, it ended up falling to Black Knight. Even developing these new campaigns, it’s like... *(laughs)* We’re trying so hard not to use Black Knight in that same “plot device” role! *(laughs)* It just kind of kept getting more and more, you know... But it also works because as an alternate to Shovel Knight, Black Knight has his own agenda that he’s trying to see through, and it just so happens that a lot of that brings a lot more plot Shovel Knight’s way. It’s like, [Black Knight] is trying to solve it in his own way, or fix things in his own way, and that’s why he shows up as he does.

We do leave it open-ended a little bit on purpose, because we have ideas for the background and why those characters are connected, but as a character that’s pushing the story through, I think Black Knight is pretty interesting and mysterious and, like, fits his name a little bit. It’s like... Black Knight is an “honest” character that maybe helps players put themselves into the story more. He’s a character that has the right intentions but doesn’t really know the details, or is not correct, and he’s following this path. But he’s really true to it, and is really trying to do the right thing, right? That’s something I think everyone can latch onto as something that happens in their own lives, right? That’s what makes Black Knight an appealing character. He’s not, like, just evil with a cackling laugh. *(laughs)* He’s not the dumb rival who’s just against you for no apparent reason. He’s not, like, “testing you” because that’s cool. He actually is trying to do something, and it just so happens that you’re crossing paths a few times because of that.

**He does cackle, though, which is one of my favorite parts of the game... *(laughs)***

*(everyone laughs)*



## GAMEPLAY: A MODERN SPIN ON RETRO TROPES

**Let’s switch gears to the gameplay, then. Something I think a lot of critics and fans love about *Shovel Knight* is that it not only borrows, but also repurposes and builds on elements from the best games of yesteryear. Was that concept of improving on the classics – and not just emulating them – a driving force throughout development?**

Definitely. It seemed almost impossible to do exactly what other people have done, especially when we brought our PAX demo to people and everyone came up to us saying, “Oh, I love NES games, but please don’t make it NES hard. Please don’t do that.” Right? Like, “I like *Crystalis* but I don’t like this about it.” You naturally go, “Well, if we made those games people wouldn’t like it, because they’re telling us that.” And those games already exist. Like, why make those games again? People would tell us, “I’ve played a lot of *Mega Man*, and I’ll keep playing *Mega Man*, but don’t put in all the *Mega Man* things [into your game].” There might be some fun to the idea of us making exactly a *Mega Man* game, but at the same time, you can just go play *Mega Man*.

One of our earliest decisions that sort of set the tone was axing extra lives. We axed extra lives really early. Like, extra lives were not a part of *Shovel Knight* once it was funded. We already knew back then [that we didn’t want extra lives], and that kind of already set the tone of, “Just because that’s exactly how it worked in those games, that’s maybe not what we should do 100 percent.” It’s always worth a discussion, it’s always worth talking about. Maybe there’s a way to do it better, or maybe there’s something else we could look into.

**That’s a great point, because the checkpoint system you came up with has kind of a great risk/reward concept to it, and I think that’s an element a lot of people have specifically called out as something they love about *Shovel Knight*. Did that kind of come naturally from the decision to nix extra lives, or was that a separate thing you came up with?**



It’s all in steps. It’s like, “Okay, we’re not going to have extra lives, so we can just have a checkpoint. *Mega Man* has one checkpoint per stage. Let’s try that.” And it’s like way, way not enough. And you can’t even tell where the checkpoint is, so we should probably make the checkpoint visible. But then it was like, are there too many checkpoints? It would be so easy for you to just go through and if there are seven checkpoints in each stage, then it isn’t going to be much of a challenge. But if there was more of a challenge for the checkpoint itself, like, what if you could... what if you had to pay for it, right? Initially, it was like you had to pay for the checkpoint, like 500 gold to buy the checkpoint. We were like, that would be cool because it would incentivize you to collect more gold. You’d get to spend mid-stage, you’d think about gold more. But then players that weren’t so good at the game would be punished even more than they were already, because they couldn’t save their progress at the checkpoint.

So we flipped it around and said, “Okay, well, what if instead, by breaking the checkpoint and making it no longer valid, you could get money back?” It was all really natural. All those steps, though? That wasn’t, like, a Saturday. It took forever. *(everyone laughs)* It was over a course of months. That’s why everything takes forever, because we iterate through it all. All of the ideas – even the ones that are inspired directly by some other game or some other element – still need to be integrated specifically into *Shovel Knight*’s gameplay universe. We’ll try to think through them in a way that makes them more unique to what we’re doing as opposed to just having, like, *Mega Man* disappearing blocks in there. We didn’t have those in there because what would Shovel Knight... how would he interact with them, right? Like, what would digging do? What would bouncing on them and down-thrusting on them do? Just by really trying to make it all more holistic, it led naturally to the incremental gameplay improvements for every object in the game.



Well, you also could have just made checkpoints DLC... then everybody wins!

(everyone laughs)

In some cases, yeah, it's not even that this is a better execution of existing ideas; it's more just... this is a better execution for *Shovel Knight*. These mechanics work better in the world that is *Shovel Knight*. I think that's what you spend a lot of time during development trying to figure out – what is the game you're making? Everyone has ideas of what a cool game is. You can say, "I like games that are super fast and I'm running all the time and I'm like Sonic and I'm matching three colors," and you try to match what you like into a game until you realize that's not what this game is, or it doesn't work. And then you figure out what *Shovel Knight* is, and then you're like, "Oh, let's keep building up what this thing is." But those mechanics could possibly work better in another game. Like, lives in certain games are fun and interesting. I wouldn't say lives are an outdated concept, but for *Shovel Knight*, we wanted to emphasize forward momentum and not having to restart a bunch. If it didn't work for *Shovel Knight*, we tuned it out.

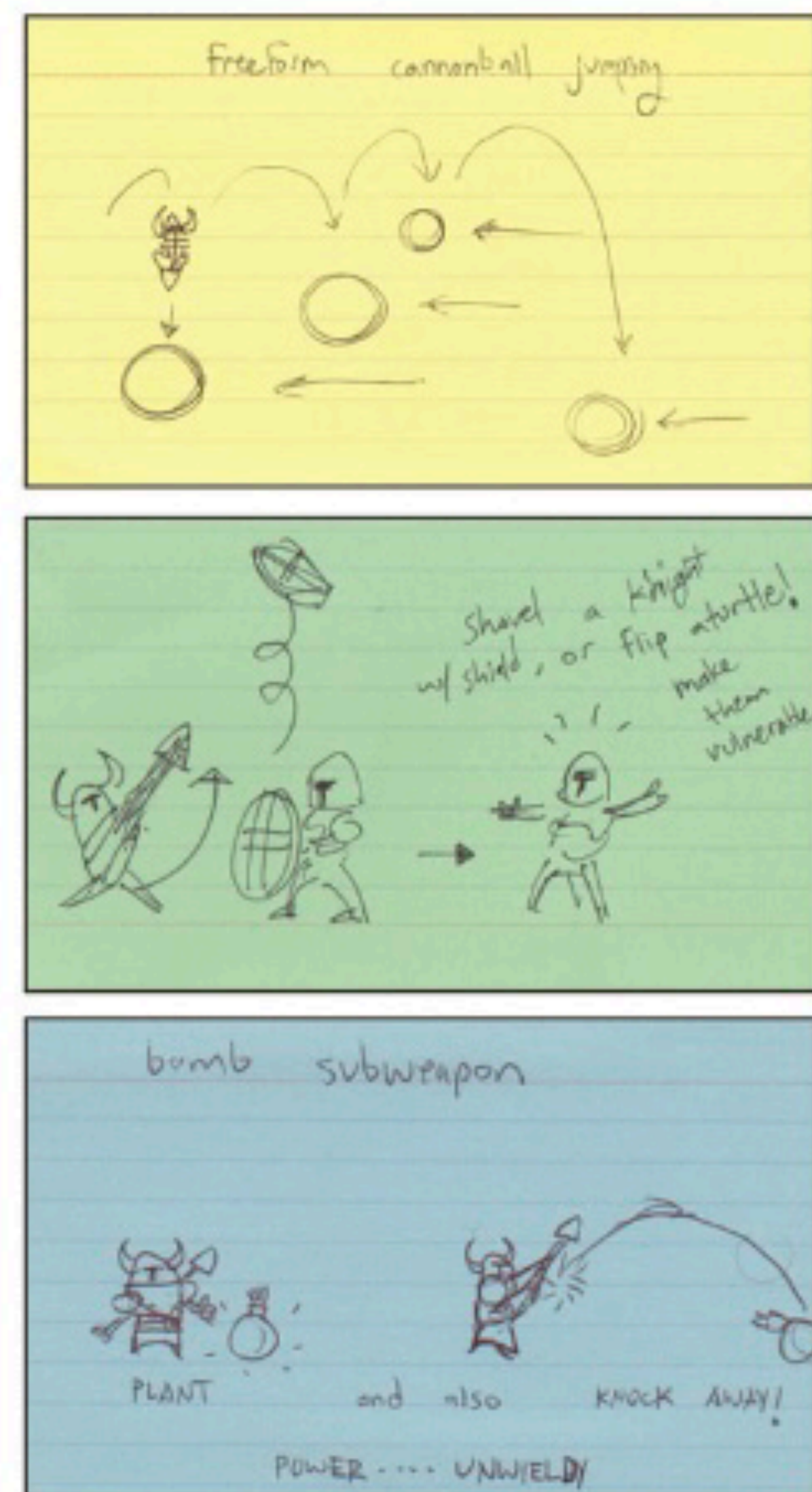
You've talked about how *Shovel Knight* was inspired by various classics – I've identified elements like Mega Man's fine midair movement, the *Super Mario Bros. 3*-esque world map, and you've got the hit recoil and down thrust from *Zelda II*, among other influences – but are there any other specific games you haven't mentioned that you pulled inspiration from?

Yeah – like, every object and everything in the entire game has probably been ripped off from some other game. (laughs) But everyone is responsible for different amounts of what their inspiration comes from, probably. A lot of times when we're talking about an object or mechanic [in the game], we'll talk about, "Maybe some other game did it better. Let's look at that and see what they did," and then we'll fix it or just... copy it, maybe, a little bit? (laughs) Even just subconsciously... it's like, an enemy that appears behind you to surprise you when you pass it, right? Even without realizing it, I'm probably thinking of an enemy from a weird NES game that I played way back when and I can't even remember it exactly. But it's like, him blinking in and making that noise... for some reason that really stuck with me, so that's how I think it should work. It's like, I can picture it in my head so perfectly but I can't think of the name of the game. It's like a collective consciousness of our NES or, like, classic game knowledge.

Whenever a new object was conceived of, even something that's been done like a million times – like a big boss that jumps at you like the Super Skeleton, or the crushing layer from the Tower [of Fate] – we looked at examples from other games of what some of their best-implemented solutions were and kind of came up with one of our own. But once again, we really attempted to put a twist on pretty much everything that we had in some way, and I think that's part of what makes [*Shovel Knight*] feel unique. Instead of just making what was there, it's like we tried to really understand what that thing is, and then make it using that knowledge.

Sure.

One of our favorite things is when we implement something and it's done, and we haven't looked at it for a month or two or whatever, and then somebody shows us a video of an old NES game we haven't played and it's, like, exactly the same thing we did. (laughs) It's like they also had the same thought process and arrived at the same conclusion. There's only one right answer for some of these things. (laughs)



One point of inspiration that I don't think a lot of people were expecting – I know I wasn't – was *Zelda II*. The first time I ever played *Shovel Knight*, the first thing I thought was, "Oh, this hit recoil feels exactly like *Zelda II*," and I can't think of another game that has really cared to emulate anything from *Zelda II*. So can you talk a bit about – (everyone laughs) – well, what's so interesting is that you guys clearly had *Zelda II* as a specific reference point. But obviously *Zelda II* is usually seen as the black sheep of that series, so how did that come about?

I think, like... (laughs) ...a lot of us are of the opinion that it's an amazing game. (laughs) There are a lot of things wrong with it, obviously, which is why it doesn't appeal to as many people. But there are so many strong elements in that game that are really, really fun and really, really appealing... they're very different and are not used again, which is just bizarre. [Those elements] made for a very unique adventure. It's funny, because when the game came out – when *Shovel Knight* released in the West – everyone talked about it and said, "Oh, it's like *DuckTales*." But it's like, well, that's not really... that's not what we're going for. And *Zelda II* was... that was always the one where we had to say, like, "No, actually, *Zelda II* was the inspiration for some of the combat." But *Shovel Knight* recently released in Japan, and the biggest difference we've seen in feedback is that people in Japan are saying, "Oh, it's like *Zelda III*!" So it's a little bit better received over there, and so because of that, they're seeing those parallels in addition to all the other feedback.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced during development? Are there any specific stories you want to share?

The biggest thing we were always struggling with – and still struggle with – is the difficulty of the game. Like, whenever we come up with a new concept... you know, even something like lives, right? That's about difficulty, and the checkpoints were about difficulty, and everything about it was figuring out how to make [the game] challenging and interesting for people who could plow through a *Mega Man* game, but also for people who have never touched a game like that. If we went to a convention or looked in our inbox right now, I bet we could find a bunch of people saying "I love *Shovel Knight* but I wish it was more difficult," and just as many emails saying "I want to love *Shovel Knight* but it's too hard for me." Like, it's both the most impossible game and the easiest game because people's level of understanding and familiarity with this kind of game can really vary.

We came [into *Shovel Knight*] fresh off the tales of [the team's previous works] *BloodRayne: Betrayal* and *Double Dragon Neon*, which both got, like, 9s and 2s from people loving it or hating it, and it just came down to whether they could play the game or not, or whether they could understand it. That was such a big part about *Shovel Knight* – making it understandable. The way you interact with the world around you is something that, once you've set it, it's hard to change it, right? So it comes down to making a bunch of situations that can only work in a way that tips you off to how the game actually functions, and creating that perfect model of the game in your brain. That's what all of *Shovel Knight* is about: going into situations and developing an understanding of how to get past them, and then using that knowledge you've learned and applying it to the next situation. It's like allowing them to understand [the game] to make it as easy as possible for them.

The Relics are a great example; the reason we don't have a new weapon at the end of each stage [in *Shovel Knight*] is because in *Mega Man*, you get a weapon and you don't use it because you don't know what it does or when it's useful. It may not even be useful in the next stage at all, because you choose the next stage. So we made the decision to put the Relics in the stages themselves to emphasize them, and tried to make it so that when you got a new Relic, you could use it and see its effects immediately. There are other cues, too. You have to spend money on it; that means it's important. It comes in a unique blue chest; that means it's important. And usually it would be in some situation – at least hopefully – where there would be a use for that Relic immediately after you acquire it, right? So then you think about it. And then we put you in situations that are challenging, so you go, like, "I can't do this," and then you think, "I need something to help me – oh, wait, I have that sub-weapon! I forgot I had sub-weapons!" But if you don't put it right in front of people, there's a big chance they're going to forget about it. So it's like, it's not just the action of how to control the characters, but the knowledge that



is in your head as you're playing the game... that's one of the most important elements of the overall design. It's like making the picture of the game in your brain match what you're actually making. And in a lot of instances, you don't have a lot of time to communicate those things, and so a lot of it falls to the art to be as clear as possible. It's up to the art to make sure it's not confusing what the shapes are; the art has to make it clear where you're supposed to hit a guy and where his hitboxes are, when he's going to be attacking you, when he's not, and when he's open and ready to be attacked.

A good example of that is in Propeller Knight's stage. There's that mid-boss called the Dinghy Dropper, and in its initial design, it was a lot longer and had more of a bow; it was triangular in form. But *Shovel Knight* doesn't deal in triangles... it's all squares. So when you have a big triangular form like that, it's really unclear where you need to stand in order to attack, and in a melee-based game, that's really, really, really important. So we squared off its front, and it's very obvious now that if you hit here, this pixel's not going to do it, but this pixel will. Establishing those languages is a really challenging thing to figure out too. It's like, what color on the screen means you can stand on it? What color means I'm going to get hit by it? How do you know what the foreground is and what the background is when you have such a limited palette that you're dealing with, and how is that made absolutely clear? *Shovel Knight* is a game where you have to inch out to the edge of the screen, or to the edge of a block, to jump. That means Shovel Knight's back foot has to be exactly at the same pixel where the back of his collision box is, and stuff like that. It's very much built for utility.

**Was there anything in the final game that got cut – or almost got cut – due to time or budget constraints?**

We used a lot. I don't think there was... there were maybe one or two – like, the game went pretty late. *(everyone laughs)* The game went late instead of cutting content. But at the same time, we did plan another Tower [of Fate] stage, but it was never even opened. It was cut for reasons like, "Hey, the amount of content we have here feels nice. Why even have another stage?" It was sort of like we envisioned, well, this is how many stages you need, and then we figured out, well, actually you don't need that many. Now that we have Relic challenges and things like that in the map, the campaign's already getting long. Do you really want... like, can we bring three unique things into three Tower stages? It's like, "Eh, no, we can probably do without it."

I'm sure there's, like, two enemies we made that are not in the game anymore. There were things cut because they didn't make sense. So we came up with jokes, or NPCs, or enemies, and stuff like that, and we put them in and we're like, "Well... maybe in another game." There's a section in this book of unused concepts, and a few of those are the caterpillar, and the bell guy from Propeller Knight's stage, and the different kinds of dragons. In each one of those instances, it was like we were already communicating those ideas enough, and we don't need to fill a space with these guys. They're just extra noise. It's like, there's seven enemies in this stage already; we can't add another one because you need to give everything enough space to breathe.

## MUSIC: 8-BIT MAESTROS

No *Shovel Knight* interview would be complete without talking at least a little bit about the incredible soundtrack, which was composed by Jake "virt" Kaufman, with a couple of tracks contributed by original *Mega Man* composer Manami Matsumae. How did they come to work on *Shovel Knight*? Did you specifically seek them out, or was it a happy accident?

We've been working with Jake forever. I don't know how many games I've made, but like 90 percent of them... they've all had Jake soundtracks. We were already kind of... we already knew who we were going with from the minute we started [on *Shovel Knight*]. But the Manami thing was... we didn't know that was going to happen, that was very much out of the blue. It was around the middle of our Kickstarter campaign and we reached out to – we received an email about it, and we actually didn't believe it...

*(laughs)*



Well, it was just like, "Hey, I know Manami Matsumae... Instead of donating to your campaign, how about I get her to do a track for you?" We're like, "Okay, well, if you can prove it, sure, but..." You know, this was in 2013 or whatever. Manami hadn't written – she hadn't written a track for 20 years that we knew of. It was like, the last time you'd heard of her was *U.N. Squadron*. So your natural response is, "No way! It's just not possible!" She did have a track in *Mega Man 10*, but she was sort of, like, off the map in terms of making games. So it was very surprising, but we were interested – it sounded really exciting, like we couldn't believe it. Out of all the... There was a lot of news going on at the time, just a lot of Kickstarter stuff, and so this was pretty amazing to hear.

**How much direction did you give Kaufman and Matsumae? Did you kind of just turn them loose because you knew that they knew what you wanted, or was there a lot of back-and-forth correspondence?**

Manami was given a bunch of documentation on the characters – what their personalities were, and what the levels were going to be like, and all of the details with that. And Jake was... Jake more or less just came over and we did the same thing with him, except we just went through it all. Jake was more involved in everything. Like, he helped out with story and dialogue, he was more just... involved with deciding not just what the tracks were going to sound like, but how many tracks we should have, or what we should do. In the village for instance, it's all the same base track, but slightly different versions of it play depending on whether you're outside, inside, or in the bar, right? And it just switches *Banjo-Kazooie* style. Some of the music and the tech, you know... we worked really closely with him on that stuff too. Plus all the sound effects and all the sound design, of course... yeah, Jake is a powerhouse of sound and music. And as we mentioned before, Jake's also really integral in writing our script too. We rely on him because he's more verbose and he's also an outside perspective, so he can bring a lot to the table when we're writing our script. He's definitely a huge member of the team.

**Last music question! Personally speaking – and I've talked to a lot of fans who feel the same way – the first time I played the first Tower of Fate stage, my instant thought was, "This is a Wily Castle theme [from *Mega Man*]!" Was that on purpose? Were you just going for that Wily Castle vibe?**

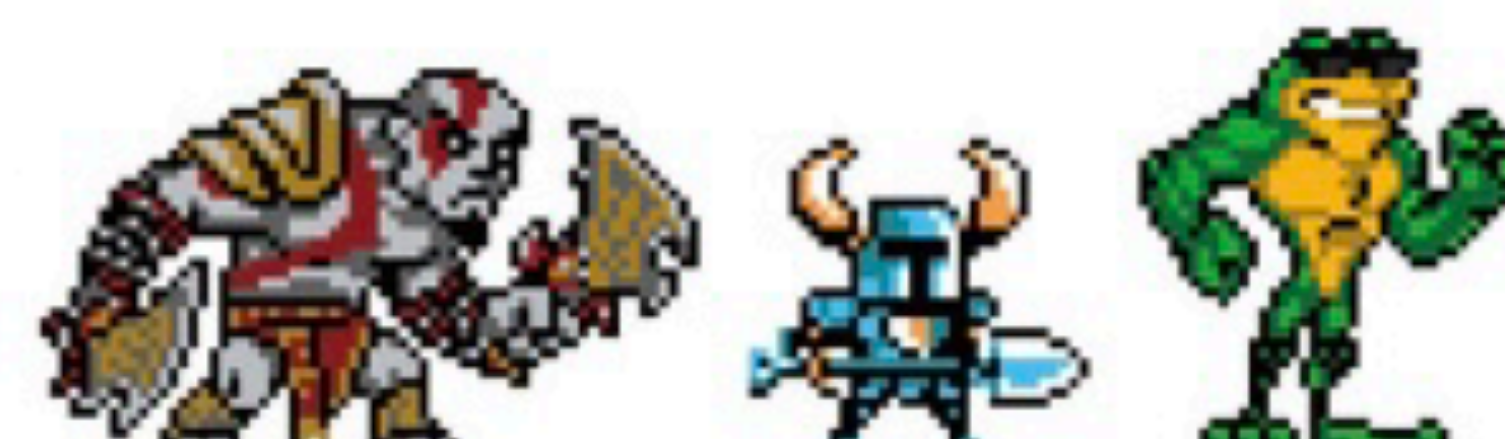
I mean, it wasn't – it's like, it is a castle... *(everyone laughs)* You're at the foot of a tower and you need to climb it – ascend it – so I think in some respects, it's very consistent just because of the idea of it. You know, a "breaking into the enemy's lair" kind of thing. And it's sort of a rehash of an earlier song, so it's like... you get that same kind of continuation, but it's also a culmination of the adventure. It's sort of like a bookend to the start of the game.

## MILESTONES: LEGENDARY CROSSOVERS

Looking back, *Shovel Knight* has really had the honor of achieving a lot of firsts for indie gaming. For example, *Shovel Knight* was the first indie character to get an amiibo on Nintendo platforms, and for the PlayStation and Xbox versions, you've got the Kratos [from *God of War*] and Battletoads cameos. Can you talk about that? Did you approach the various console publishers with these initiatives, or did they come to you?

From the beginning, even during the Kickstarter, it was sort of an idea that... We came from this history of making a bunch of

ports for all of our games, and it just seemed sort of dumb to just make ports [of *Shovel Knight*]. And we thought back to when we were kids, and you got excited about games when they felt like they were... like, if you bought it for that system, that was the only system it was on, and it was made for that game. You couldn't even fathom it being on another system, right? So that's sort of where it came from. So we did things like StreetPass and the Digger's Diary, implementing as many of each [Nintendo] system's unique features as possible just to try to get that appeal in there. So when it came to porting the game to PlayStation and Xbox, we were sort of at a loss. Like, we went to Sony and Microsoft and asked them, "Hey, what's cool about





your systems?” And they said, “Well, you tell us!” (*everyone laughs*) They were like, “Cross Buy. It’s great!” (*everyone laughs again*) And our reaction was, “Ehhhh...” So I think we just thought back to *Soulcalibur II*, which was the cool thing back then [for console exclusives]. That’s the direct reason. We thought that was the coolest thing – it’s like, you got Link... Heihachi... Spawn. (*laughs*) Which one was the one with [Darth] Vader...?

**That was *Soulcalibur IV*, I think...**

Yeah, so those were just a way of making them unique on that system, making them feel special. Plus, the SKUs came out so much later – the Steam and Nintendo versions [of *Shovel Knight*] had already come out, now it’s six months later and the new versions are going to come out for these other platforms. What cool things can we do to make it enticing again? Like, what would PlayStation fans think was cool? What would Xbox fans think was cool? That’s what we tried to accomplish. It was the same thing with the StreetPass Arena and things like that. The game was on the 3DS, and we wanted to use all the features we could to make it exciting.



As far as the amiibo goes, we personally have a lot of amiibo, and we have a lot of love for amiibo, and we knew that... when you get an amiibo, it’s cool that it can unlock stuff, and we had ideas for how we could make that work in our game. Nintendo came to us about the amiibo... well, in the beginning. It went both ways. They approached us and we pursued it heavily, and because of a lot of our efforts and, like, pushing the issue, they eventually worked something out. And a big thing for us was that we always wanted to have a big ‘80s-style merchandise campaign that went along with *Shovel Knight*. Like, we wanted to have an art book! (*everyone laughs*) And we wanted to

have toys in stores, and comic books, and cool instruction manuals... and cereal. (*everyone laughs again*) So the concept of having a toy that went along with *Shovel Knight* and integrated with the game felt like the perfect ‘80s idea.

The only reason we could even do it is because we were already starting on our merchandise plan when the opportunity arose in the first place. So it’s like, for our tiny little studio, it would be impossible. But we had a merchandising agent and a place that was going to make toys, so we already had the pieces in place and that made it a lot easier. That’s probably the biggest hurdle for most smaller companies; it’s a giant deal to get those connections made and get those people working with you. That effort was a huge deal for us. It took us a year to get the amiibo out from start to finish, and I think we had a little bit of an advantage in that regard since we already had some baseline set up for that.

## LEGACY: NEW ADVENTURES?

**Okay, we’re near the end here! You knew this question was coming, so get ready: Once all the planned content updates for *Shovel Knight* are done and out in the wild, what’s next for Yacht Club? What’s next for *Shovel Knight*? Is there a “Shovel Knight 2” or “Super Shovel Knight” on the horizon? Have you even thought that far ahead?**

We were told *Shovel Knight* would never end! (*everyone laughs*) We’re always thinking about what’s next, but we really have no idea. Like if you had asked us six months ago, everyone here would say for sure that “Shovel Knight 2” was coming next, no questions asked. But at this point... by the time we get to next year and all the content is done and out there, I’m sure we’ll totally be burned out on *Shovel Knight* and never want to see it again in our lives. (*laughs*) Even the idea for the initial game... we didn’t know we were making it until, like, two months before we did. It wasn’t like we had a dream that we needed to see happen; it was something that gathered steam and momentum with the team slowly, over time. But I think we all want to make an IP that’s bigger than *Shovel Knight*. We all want to go and make *Shovel Knight* its own series. You know – “Super Shovel Knight,” “Shovel Knight 64.” We want to continue to make brands and try to make those brands as big as possible. We want to keep making more *Shovel Knight* and to

see *Shovel Knight* expand, and become cool and different in new ways... to attack different types of games that we still feel very strongly about. Yeah, we want to see *Shovel Knight* go off in crazy directions, like “Shovel Knight RPG” or “Shovel Knight Tennis” or whatever! (*everyone laughs*) We built [*Shovel Knight*] with the idea of it being a franchise like Mario – like, we want a theme park. (*laughs*) That’s next!

**It’s funny, you mentioned six months ago... It wasn’t quite that far back, but you did recently hold an online poll asking fans what kind of game they’d like to see you make next. Do you want to say anything about that?**

That poll had a lot of response! Like, people were really excited. We didn’t expect – like, 30,000 people responded...

**Wow!**

It was crazy. Who knows how many of those were robots? (*everyone laughs*) Robots are really excited for a Metroid [game]! (*laughs*) Yeah, people like the idea of a Zelda and a Metroid the best. Not *Solstice*. (*everyone laughs*) Another way we’ve sort of been thinking about it is if *Shovel Knight* is like our Mario or our Zelda, and we’re Nintendo, then what are our other tent-pole franchises and how can we develop those? So that’s kind of where our brains are at right now with what could be next or, like, what else could be in the Yacht Club repertoire. But whatever we do next, it has to have value – it has to give the impression that we put our best foot forward. It has to feel like a game we made. And I would say the poll really has nothing to do with what we would make next. It’s more interesting to us to see what people would expect from us. So you know, you’d be really surprised if Nintendo made a Call of Duty, right? That’s sort of like what we put out as feelers too; it’s like, how excited would you be for a “Shovel Kart” coming from Yacht Club Games? How excited would you be for “Shovel Knight RPG?” That was a big one. It was crazy – it was really surprising to see how excited people were for us to make, like, a Final Fantasy game, right? That doesn’t seem like the kind of game that would come from us. It was very bizarre. That’s not to say we couldn’t make that kind of game, it’s just not connected to anything we’ve done so far. It doesn’t seem like it’s that connected to *Shovel Knight*.

**Well then, to finish things off, is there a message you’d like to impart to the *Shovel Knight* fans who pick up this art book? Something exclusive, just for them?**

We just really want to thank everybody, to thank all of our fans. They’re really the best. They’ve kept us going from the beginning – from the Kickstarter – and have stuck with us all the way to buying the game, being excited about it on the Internet, and buying this book, right? Our gratitude for them is just... that’s really what we’d like to get across. We’ve been working for three years of our lives, working on something we love, which is like... it’s pretty amazing that they could support us for that long. We read comments, we read the tweets, we read the Facebook posts, we read everything people say about [*Shovel Knight*]. We get excited like you guys do. We know a lot of the fans’ names, just like we talk about whoever shows up in the feeds. It’s like, “Oh man, Alex is here!” or whatever. So it’s cool to have that interaction, and... I don’t know. It’s definitely something that helps us. We love to hear what everyone is excited for us to do – like, wouldn’t it be cool to see Shovel Knight on a hog?! (*everyone laughs*)

**All right, that about wraps it up then! I’d like to thank you all again for taking the time out of your busy schedules to sit down with me and talk about *Shovel Knight* today. I can’t wait to see what Yacht Club has in store next!**

*– Interview conducted on September 13th, 2016, at Yacht Club Games’ offices in Marina del Rey, California*



FAN ART



SHIELD KNIGHT  
by NightMargin

BONUS







**KNIGHTLY ACQUISITION**  
by Dennis Coyle III "Brain÷"



**SHOVEL JUSTICE**  
by Thomas "TeeKetch" Ketchen



**SHOVELMEGA KNIGHTMAN COVER**  
by VR-Eli





**ENEMY CONCEPT 2**  
by Esteban Campos



**SHOVEL VS. EXCAVATOR**  
by Ven

BONUS







**DIG STRONG!**  
by Brian Townsend



**DIGGIN' JUSTICE**  
by Julio Nicolas Gonzalez Marecos



**SLED KNIGHTS**  
by Michael M. Sorrow



**MELANCHOLY KNIGHT**  
by Marc Gomez





**SHOVEL KNIGHT  
BATTLES THE GULPER MAGE**  
by Matthew Swauger



**TORCH KNIGHT**  
by Mike Burns



**NOT-A-CHANCE KNIGHT**  
by Gareth Davies



**CHEF KNIGHT**  
by Edward Kauffmann

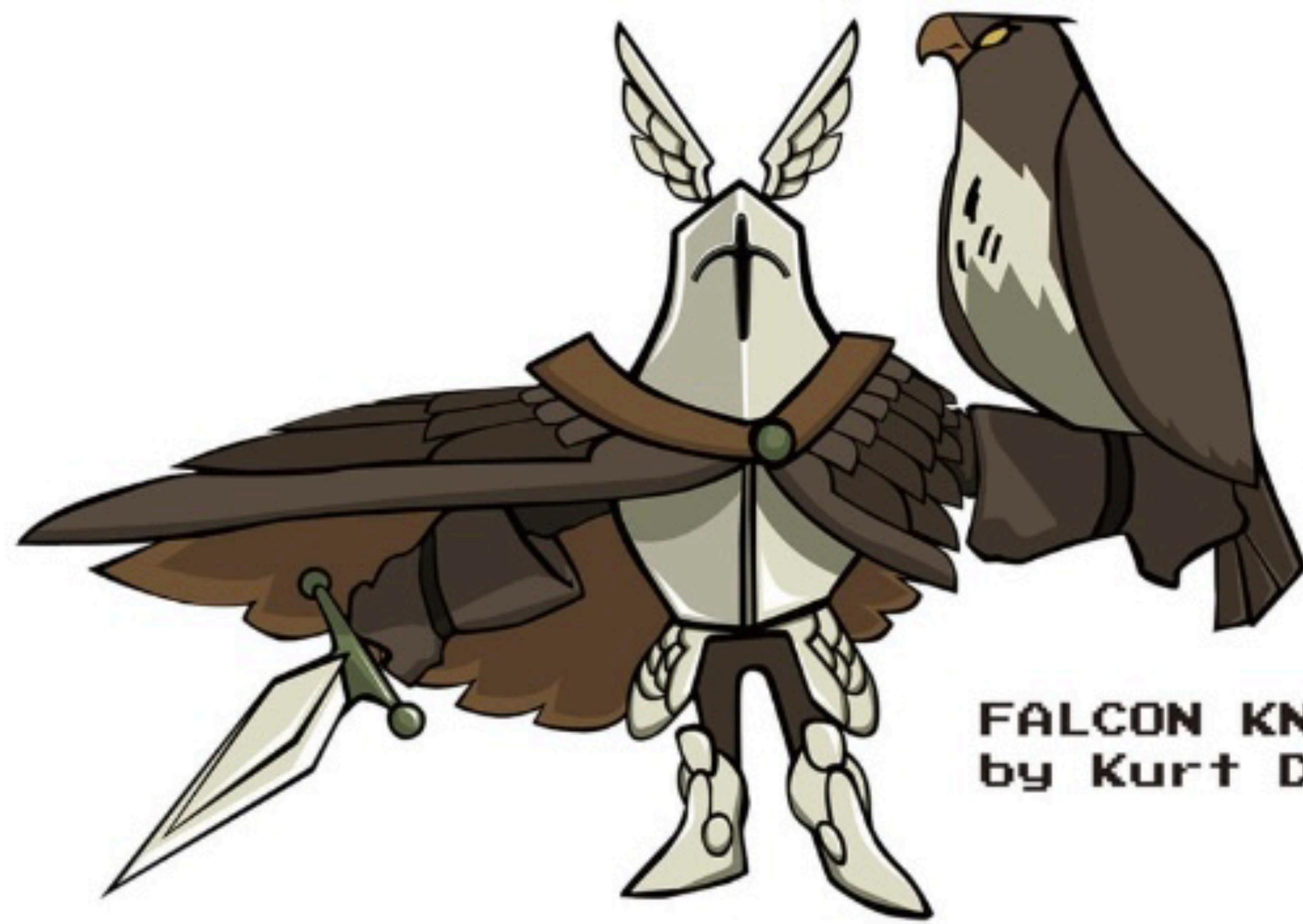


**SCARAB KNIGHT**

SCARAB KNIGHT  
by Bill Cass







**FALCON KNIGHT**  
by Kurt Deniz

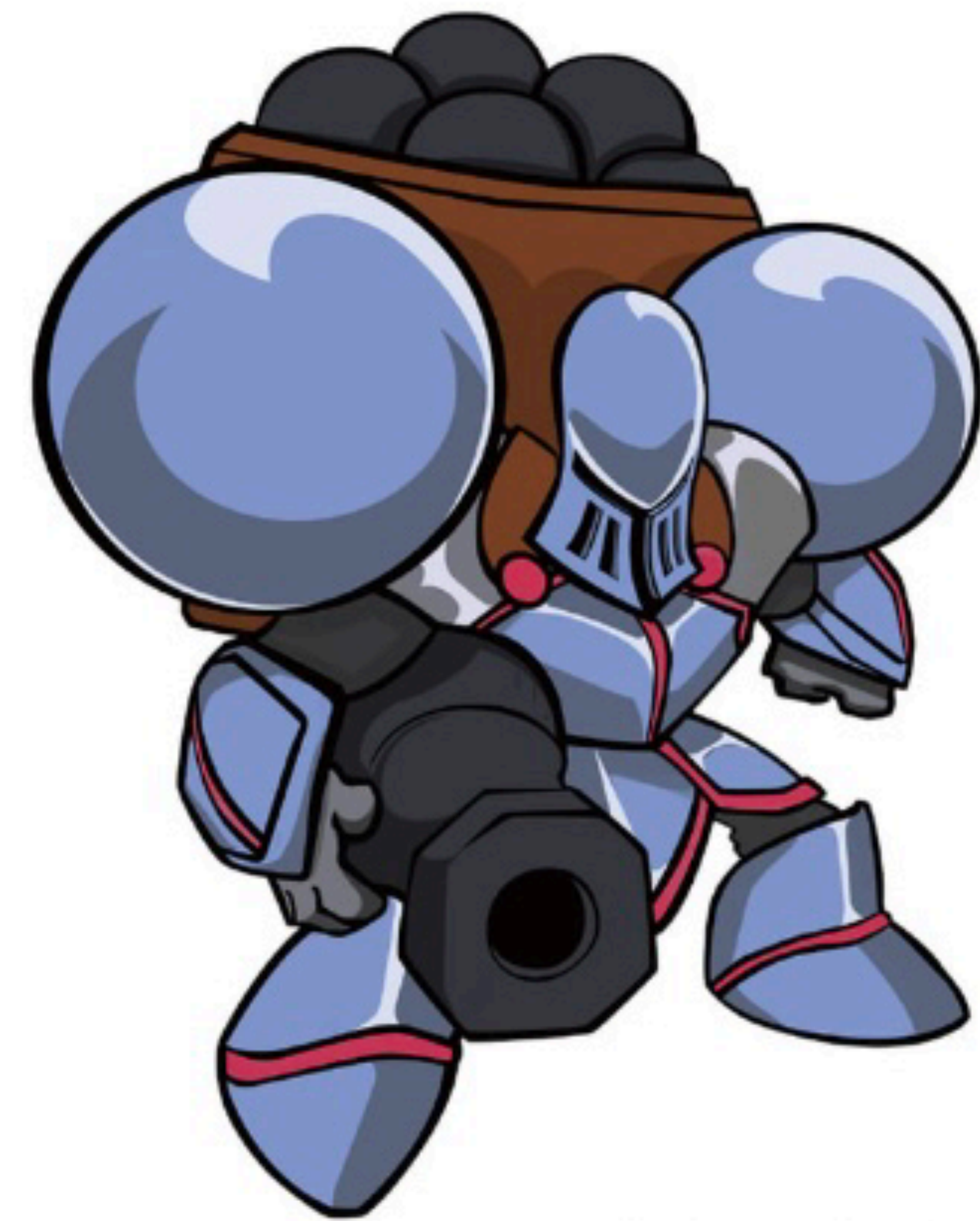


Falcon  
Knight



**THE KNIGHT OWL**  
by Frankie Franco III

THE  
KNIGHT  
OWL



**SIEGE KNIGHT**  
by Kurt Deniz



Siege  
Knight



**SHOVEL KNIGHT  
VERSUS DRILL KNIGHT**  
by Ian Kahler



**HOSE KNIGHT**  
by Josiah Colborn



**OCTO KNIGHT**  
by Julio Bencid



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